

We need the

Employee
FREE
CHOICE ACT
NOW!

‘We Need Unions So Workers Like Me Can Live the American Dream’

The backlash began as soon as managers discovered that Vernetta McCray and coworkers at St. Johns Community Services — a residential program serving people with disabilities — wanted to form a union.

“They fired some of my co-workers, pressured others, and threatened to institutionalize our clients,” McCray said. “It was an awful experience. I soon learned that our laws did nothing to protect me from management intimidation.”

Within a week of launching the organizing drive, 75 percent of workers signed cards seeking a union. While some were frightened away by the company’s bitter campaign in the weeks leading to the NLRB election, a majority cast ballots to join CWA Local 1037. The vote, in January 2005, was 33-19.

But their hopes of negotiating better wages and being a collective voice for better patient care were soon dashed.

Management appealed the election and dragged its feet at the bargaining table, knowing they could get away with it. Studies show that in one-third of all first contract negotiations, employers refuse to bargain in good faith — if at all.

“St. Johns simply refused to negotiate with the union — they cancelled most of the negotiating sessions,” CWA Local 1037 Organizing Director Anne Luck said. “This employer knew our labor laws no longer protect workers, and they just took advantage.”

The union filed multiple unfair labor practice complaints and the case of one fired worker is still pending at the NLRB in Washington, D.C.

Luck noted that the union has since learned that the non-profit company spent more than four times the amount of money to stop the union than it would have taken to give workers the wage increase the union proposed.

Ultimately, the state of New Jersey didn’t renew its contract with St. John’s and turned the group homes over to other agencies.

“I am one of thousands of workers who are denied the right to form unions each year,” said McCray, who now works for state children’s services. “If the Employee Free Choice Act

was law, fear could no longer be used as a weapon against workers. We need more unions so more workers like me can live the American dream.”



Vernetta McCray