

Berndt Erikson
Kittery

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Berndt Erikson, I am a resident of Kittery and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1711.

A few weeks ago, I was working at Dollar General. I watched my manager - who was a salaried worker, expecting to work 40 hours a week - working twice that without breaks, without overtime, without any form of thanks or additional compensation. I witnessed deliberate understaffing in order to exploit that salary. These blatant worker violations were frustrating, and I watched my salaried manager quit after working 70-hour weeks for six weeks without being compensated for the extra time. She was making less than minimum wage when you looked at her salary and the hours being worked. This was clear exploitation of a salaried worker.

There were times when it would be too busy at work to take a break - impossible to do when a store is understaffed. At times I would actually clock out and work through my break time so I wouldn't get written up for not taking my break or not finishing an assigned task. I would most commonly work an unpaid break in order to put away refrigerated items: the delivery truck would show up when I was on break and I was the only person with the authority to receive the truck. These were some of the most stressful nights to work - working a 9 hour shift and not having the time to eat or stop working.

When I first started working at Dollar General, I signed a document that took away my right to pursue legal action if I experienced any discrimination, wage theft, or harassment. Instead, if I brought something up, it would have to be through private arbitration - typically in a location and through a format of my employer's design.

The ability to be a whistleblower protects both workers AND customers from bad practices many companies keep participating in.

I quit my job at Dollar General because of the injustices I was seeing and experiencing. After my manager walked out because of the immense expectations she was under, I thought management would contact us to talk about some solutions to our staffing shortage at our store. That didn't happen. It looked like our corporate office didn't care about us. So I, along with my coworker, decided to quit.

Workers deserve to be treated better - and if we are dealing with issues at work, we deserve for those issues to be taken seriously. We deserve to have the right to file a complaint publicly and hold corporations accountable.

That's why I'm here today: to advocate for workers like my former manager, like myself, like many others, who want and need to be empowered to hold law breaking corporations accountable. I want to make sure that those who experience wage theft, discrimination, and forms of harassment are able to move forward and file a complaint outside of the closed doors of a corporation.

Please vote to support LD 1711.

Thank you.