

Carrie Walsh
Topsham

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

You know those plastic clipstrips in grocery stores? The ones that usually have small items on them, like straws or magnets? Just over a year ago I was working for a company that was responsible for the ordering, stocking, and management of these items - Jacent Merchandising. I was the area manager responsible for parts of Maine. The items we were providing were already available in the stores: the only difference was that they would be found on shelves instead of the plastic clips we restocked.

Many of the people I was working with were retirees and other high risk individuals. They were trying to make some extra cash to cover essentials. Jacent didn't provide masks or gloves but were still requiring that we go inside of very crowded, hectic areas.

I didn't think that the work we were doing should fall under the umbrella of "essential work", and I attempted to say so to my direct supervisor. The message I got back was that workers didn't have to do the work, but then they wouldn't make any money. Some of my former coworkers expressed issues they had with getting unemployment benefits approved as the company tended to dispute unemployment claims.

The work we were doing was an obvious potential spread for COVID: our workers were going in and out of grocery stores across New England, coming in contact with many different people. Since I was getting nowhere with my direct supervisors, I decided to try another tactic. I sent an all-staff email to everyone, including the CEO, to discuss my concerns. Within minutes, I was completely locked out of the system, and was essentially fired. I couldn't even file for my last paycheck. Nobody responded to me, they just ignored my messages. I did hear from dozens of employees who were scared of speaking out or doing something. Many of them were working paycheck to paycheck and were scared of taking any action themselves.

I started to move through the legal system to take action. A few months ago as I was moving through the steps I was sent a copy of an arbitration agreement that I had unknowingly signed. When I was first hired, I was sent a large virtual document through DocuSign and had to sign every document in order to work. So I didn't really have a choice.

I was told that because I had signed this arbitration agreement I could not sue. I was also told that because it had been over a year since I was fired that I could not use arbitration. So where does this leave me?

I strongly urge this committee to support LD 1711. We need to hold law-breaking companies accountable and protect workers. The fact that I've heard from dozens of workers experiencing issues is so telling. The ability to blow the whistle can expose company-wide violations that might go unchecked otherwise.

Thank you.

Carrie Walsh
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