



the work and family legal center

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE US SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR & PENSIONS

Submitted by

Armanda Legros

A Better Balance Client & Community Advocate

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My name is Armanda Legros. I live in Queens, New York, with my two boys, Aveyl (age 4) and Ayden (16 months). It's just them and me—I am the sole breadwinner for our family.

I worked for an armored truck company on Long Island for two years before I was pushed out of my job. I was 6 and 1/2 months pregnant when I pulled a muscle in my stomach doing some heavy lifting at work and had to miss the rest of the week recovering. My doctor told me to avoid heavy lifting so I wouldn't hurt myself again, and gave me a note to bring into work. My manager took one look at the note and sent me home without pay, indefinitely. He said I could only work if I had no restrictions—company policy. I knew this wasn't true: they had accommodated my co-worker who had injured his back on-the-job. The result was devastating.

Having a child shouldn't mean losing your job. It should



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not lead to fear and financial dire straits. But the experience of having my son- without a paycheck- was one of the hardest for my family.

I tried to get another job, but I was showing and I could tell from the interviews that no one was going to hire me. I had to go 7 months without pay when I needed that income more than ever. My credit score dropped and I almost lost my apartment when I fell behind on rent payments. Even when I applied for emergency rental assistance, I didn't qualify because I didn't have any income coming in. My employer fought my unemployment benefits, and when they did finally arrive, it was still only a fraction of my original salary. I had no choice but to apply for public assistance. The experience was so draining. I almost fainted after waiting in line for hours. I actually fell to the ground. Thankfully, the stranger behind me was kind enough to help me up. I was desperate to leave but dreaded the thought of going back.

When I was eight and a half months pregnant, my health insurance was cut off. I couldn't afford the COBRA payments and had to apply for Medicaid for my prenatal care. Once my baby arrived, just putting food on the table for him and my four-year-old was a challenge. I was forced to use water in his cereal at times because I could not afford milk.

I was scared every time I looked in my empty fridge.



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I'm doing my best to get back on my feet, but it's been really hard. I had to apply for Medicaid for my kids, and have relied on food stamps to help feed my family. I started a new job in February but they only give me 17-18 hours of work per week, about \$260/week. As a part-time worker, I don't get any benefits. And since I work in Nassau County, the New York City Paid Sick Time law does not protect me. If I got pregnant again and needed a modest accommodation to maintain a healthy pregnancy or recover from childbirth, the New York City Pregnant Workers Fairness Act wouldn't help me either. I have to wait 6 months to be eligible for a full-time position at my new job, which means it will be August 2015, at the earliest, before I could be entitled to Family and Medical Leave.

I used to have some security in my job. I used to be able to support my family and myself. Now I worry what happens if I get sick or my kids get sick. We simply can't afford it. I can't even afford childcare for both of my kids—care for them costs an entire month's paycheck.

I hate knowing this happens to other women in New York and all over the country, but I know it does. All the time. The lawyers at A Better Balance are working to defend and advance my legal rights—I shouldn't have been pushed out of my job for being pregnant and trying to do right by my family. They've also inspired me to use my voice to seek fairness and justice for all women—both in New York and nationwide. That's why I'm here



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today.

I implore you to stand up for women like me so we have an equal shot in the workplace. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act would ensure that no expecting mother in America has to choose between her job and a healthy pregnancy. And workers in this country need paid sick days and family leave to care for a new child or seriously ill family member. If you truly value families, and children, then you have to make sure that the women who bear those children and raise them can earn the fair and equal wages we need to support them.

Thank you for this opportunity and thank you for listening.