

**Testimony from Renee Nied, Grocery Clerk, Springfield Coop (UFCW 1459),
3/2/2023**

My name is Renee Nied and I work in a grocery store in Springfield VT and I am a member of UFCW Local 1459 which was voluntarily recognized in July 2021.

Throughout the entire campaign, I witnessed the following behaviors by management toward workers: intimidation, fearmongering, and disinformation. I personally experienced both one on one, and departmental captive audience meetings with my immediate supervisor where I, as notetaker, was instructed to not record management comments about the union campaign- the only time ever I was told not to write something down.

Now I know that your ears probably perked up when I said that our union was voluntarily recognized and that you might think that meant that the Union was accepted without incident. However, what voluntary recognition did was allow my employer to maintain a wonderful public image while, simultaneously, launch a personal and targeted attack against the person who had become a leader in the campaign- me.

Management's approach was this:

They encouraged and allowed an anti-Union employee in a "lead" position to continue to attack the Union and to turn that attack into a personal attack against me as an organizer.

In this somewhat leadership position, this employee was granted access to an office where he held many closed-door captive audience meetings with co-workers. Reports received from some of these workers were that they felt intimidated, that they were subjected to politics and that they felt "very skeezy."

From my immediate supervisor, I was subjected to increased job scrutiny and increased supervision.

As the attacks and bullying increased, I spoke to my boss about the impact these behaviors were having on me and her reply was that the only successful solution she could see was for one of us to resign.

I then reported the toxic and hostile work environment to both the General Manager and HR and their reply was basically: "we will investigate and find out what is happening."

As of today, the General Manager, the HR person and my supervisor have resigned and the results of that investigation have never been produced.

Meanwhile, the anti-union employee filed for decertification, which was dismissed. In June of 2022, that employee was rewarded by being promoted to management.

In his new position as Manager, that employee continued to hold captive audience meetings and now he was in a position to impact workers' pay, schedule, vacation and

duties. The opportunity for intimidation and abuse of power was, and remains, tremendous.

Captive audience meetings create a workplace where:

the manager in charge of your work schedule, your duties, your vacation approval and your wages abuses their position with the knowledge and support of senior management;

where the appearance of disagreeing with what a manager is saying or doing can lead to bullying, personal attacks and the suggestion that the only way things will get better for you is by quitting;

and where an understanding that supporting a Union can lead to unchecked bullying and intimidation.

It is not easy to be dispassionate about my experience.

What it felt like, for me, was having my employment and my right to join a Union linked to my ability to withstand personal attack, misinformation and apathy- all generated via captive audience meetings but here is why I feel compelled to testify today:

for a lot of grocery workers, this may be their first job. It is wrong to let new workers- some future workers believe that captive audience meetings are how workplaces operate. That the implied threat of feeling insecure and helpless for a wage is acceptable- lest bullying be directed at you.

Finally, two of the workers who attended the captive audience meetings were 16-year-old girls. I don't even know if their parents were aware that that was happening.

S. 102, the VT PRO Act, needs to be passed to protect employees' ability to opt out of the spread of misinformation, fearmongering and intimidation without fear of discipline. This Act needs to be passed so that the line between bully and boss can be maintained. Pass the VT PRO Act so that workers have an additional tool to help them maintain their dignity, their right to a non-toxic work environment and their right to Unionize.

I urge the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs to pass the PRO Act.

Thank you.