

Why Workers Need the Employee Free Choice Act

Verizon Wireless and Verizon Business: A Clear Pattern of Illegal Behavior and Discrimination

Verizon has made no secret of its opposition to the Employee Free Choice Act. In a statement distributed recently to Verizon Business employees, the company stated that “we oppose the efforts of organized labor to take away employees’ right to private vote in a union election.”

But the record clearly shows that Verizon systematically blocks workers from exercising a vote, or any voice on the job. In fact, Verizon is the poster child for why workers need the Employee Free Choice Act.

Verizon Wireless is one of the nation’s biggest wireless providers, second only in size to AT&T/Cingular Wireless. But the difference between the two companies couldn’t be clearer. AT&T/Cingular Wireless respects its employees and lets them make their own choice about union representation. As a result, some 40,000 AT&T/Cingular employees have a union voice.

What does Verizon really think about workers making a fair choice about union representation in their workplace? Not much, and here’s the proof.

In March 2002, employees at Verizon Wireless in Bakersfield, Calif., petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for a vote on union representation. Verizon Wireless appealed and stalled the proceedings for more than two years. [Cellco Partnership, d/b/a Verizon Wireless and Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Case 31-RC-8072.]

In April 2001, several hundred Verizon Information Services workers in New Jersey sought union representation and an election to get their union voice. Verizon petitioned the NLRB to stop the scheduled election, demanding that a card check agreement it had earlier negotiated – but refused to honor from day one – be used instead. [Case No. 22-RC-12067.]

Verizon has been repeatedly cited by the NLRB for violating employees’ rights and for unfair labor practices. It tried to stop workers from distributing information about the union on their own time, it threatened employees who wanted to discuss their own bonuses or earnings with oth-

ers, and its managers at the Woburn, Mass., service center threatened employees that the center would be shut down if workers chose a union voice.

And Verizon made good on that last threat. Call centers that had a growing number of union supporters were shut down between 2000 and 2004, putting 2,000 people out of work in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey. Those jobs were moved to South Carolina and other locations in the Southeast.

When the NLRB again found Verizon guilty of violating workers’ rights – including retaliatory discipline against two employees in Orangeburg, N.Y., who were union supporters, the penalty was meaningless.

Verizon Wireless merely was directed to mail a statement to the homes of all the employees of the Orangeburg center – already closed – that it will rescind all rules prohibiting employees from talking about the union and all rules prohibiting employees from discussing their discipline.

No wonder Verizon thinks that current labor law works just fine. It breaks the law with impunity, with no fear of any meaningful penalty. Meanwhile, workers are deprived of their right to a voice at work.

It’s pulling the same tricks at Verizon Business: refusing to recognize the choice of more than 60 percent of technicians in New York and New England who want a union voice; holding mandatory, “captive audience” meetings; distributing misinformation about CWA and the benefits that union-represented workers at Verizon have, and fostering an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

That’s why workers need the Employee Free Choice Act. It provides a mechanism for employees to make a free and fair – uncoerced – choice about union representation on the job. It includes real penalties for companies like Verizon that are serial abusers of workers’ rights. And it provides a fair path for both parties to reach a first contract.

The reforms of the Employee Free Choice Act are long overdue.

Communications Workers of America ■ The Union for the Information Age ■ www.freechoiceatverizon.com

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