

Good afternoon Rhode Island House Labor Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill # 6352 - Dignity at Work Act

My name is Karin Johnsen, and I live in Walpole, Ma, where I have owned a home since 1996. I retired in December of 2020 from a telecommunications company with forty-one years.

I want to see legislation pass on House Bill # 6352 - Dignity at Work Act because bullying in the workplace is a serious and often neglected issue detrimental to a person's health and welfare. Many targets of being bullied are affected for life.

I began my career in 1979. I was a customer service sales representative, a teaching coach to my peers, and a contact for escalations on high-profile complaints. I loved my job, my customers and made great friends. I was well-liked and respected.

Sadly, I saw the dark side of management, co-workers, and the Union. Over four decades, I witnessed rudeness, arguments, evilness, physical attacks, personal property damaged, belittling, humiliation, alienation, manipulation, and gaslighting. I took the slings and arrows from bullies for years.

In 2007 the group I worked with witnessed a co-worker being harassed and belittled by his reporting manager. People from other departments begged us to get the manager to stop. Everyone felt terrible. No one wanted retribution.

They say, "be the change you want to see." I became a Union steward in 2007. I wanted the bullying to stop. We opened a grievance to rid accusations of this man's terrible work performance. We won. He chose to move to a different department with a new manager. Unfortunately, the abuse turned on me.

The manager retaliated against me for years. I suffered a long series of low-intensity abuse. Vividly I remember coming back after bereavement from my mom's passing away. Co-workers hugged me on my return. I started to cry. The manager screamed at me, told me to "step away from your desk, get your composure, get back to your desk, and start servicing our customers.

The worst abuse to me that lasted the longest was from a co-worker in my recent group. It was "casual brutality" that endured over the years. She always had the "never minds," the waving of the hand- "I'm all set," because she could not wait until I finished up with another person I had been working with while I was coaching. She made fun of the organic food I would eat, insinuating the food was rotten because of its different colors. One time I was alone in the kitchen area with her and said, "I hate you." I told her, "Well, that's not very nice to say."

She would stand at my desk and poke me hard in my arm when asking me questions. Like water dripping on a rock over time, the rock can split. She wanted to crush my confidence and good-natured spirit.

In 2020, she came up behind me and slammed her knee into mine. My body dropped down significantly. She laughed and said, "I didn't think you were going to drop down that far." She never apologized. Abusive words now turned to physical abuse. The management had to report this to Security. The manager retaliated against me for months. The Union business agent minimized what happened and said, "it was a joke." They ignored the fact that I was physically injured. Not being supported by the company and Union impacted me profoundly.

I was out of work for seven weeks. The highly conservative insurance company called to advise that they would pay me. They wondered if this type of behavior happened a lot. They suggested I let them know if my bully continued her behavior.

In a time of social justice and making things right, I urge you to pass House Bill # 6352 - Dignity at Work Act for the dignity and protection of all people who work with others. Everyone has the human right to a safe and healthy workplace. I feel confident that this bill can prohibit bullying in the workplace.

I leave you with these parting words by Martin Luther King Jr.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thank you for this opportunity to give my testimony.

Respectfully please do not share my testimony with the public.

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