

**TESTIMONY
OF
PAMELA JOHNSTON, 32BJ SEIU MEMBER
ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESPONSIBILITY ACT
FOR THE
PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE COMMERCE COMMITTEE
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AMBRIDGE, PA**

**32BJ SEIU
209 9TH STREET, 9TH FLOOR
PITTSBURGH PA 15222
PHONE: 412-471-0690**

With more than 120,000 members, including 16,000 in Pennsylvania, 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Pam Johnston, and I work as an overnight janitor at Pitt, and I've been a union member for 18 years.

There are a lot of people here today to talk about what good jobs mean – economists, policy experts, elected officials, labor and community leaders.

But I want to remind you this is not just a policy – this is about the day-to-day lives of working people throughout Pennsylvania.

Now, nobody's going to get rich off the wages that this bill is talking about. But a decent wage is what brings stability that working people and their families.

Before I got this job, I was bouncing from one low-wage job to the next. You name the job, and I did it – from the candy store to the restaurant to the temp agency to a drug store. I was piecing together hours, struggling to pay my monthly bills, and I had to go to the welfare agency to get health care coverage. I was having a number of health issues, so I feel lucky that I was able to get public health care coverage at that time.

When I got the job at Pitt, things started to change. I don't want to sit here and tell you that now life is easy. It's not. I work hard, and I work overnight shifts. Many days it feels like I'm just passing my husband at the doorway when he's coming home from work.

But things are better than they used to be. I have health care through my job, so I don't have to worry about how I'll cover my doctor bills.

And with a steady job and a decent wage, I have been able to create a life for myself where I can stand on my own two feet. I've been able to put money aside so that I could buy a home with my husband. I never could have done that on the minimum wage jobs.

I feel lucky to have a good job, because I know not everyone does. From my neighbors to my friends, I know see the struggle is still out there. I look out the front porch, and I can see the projects down the street. The people there are getting on the bus heading downtown for work, but they're not making enough to move out of subsidized housing.

And right now my girlfriend is staying with me because she can't afford a place of her own. I know she's looking, but there's not much to find on the limited income she's got.

There are plenty – actually too many – minimum wage jobs out there as it is. We don't need the government to help create more of them. Hard-working Pennsylvanians aren't looking for hand-outs, they're just looking for decent jobs.

It's the developers who are asking for hand-outs – and if they want my money – our tax-dollars, they ought to be paying enough for my friend to get her own apartment, for my neighbors to afford their own rent.