

**Testimony of Rebia Clay Mixon
Homecare worker, Chicago, Illinois**

**On behalf of the
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**

**Before the
Workforce Protections Subcommittee
House Committee on Education and Labor**

March 3, 2009

“Family Friendly Workplace Policies”

Thank you very much for having me here today.

I am a home care worker. The job of a home care worker is to take care of someone's mother, brother, husband or wife, an aunt or grandfather when they cannot take care of themselves. I live in Chicago, where I was born and raised, and, my client is one of the greatest people God has ever created. He is unique, he is full of love and laughter and every day he makes this world a greater place. He is my brother.

Caesar was born 43 years ago with cerebral palsy and also suffers from paranoid schizophrenia. My mother would never give up on him and took care of him until she died in 1999. My brothers and sisters tried taking care of him, but they were raising their families. My children were grown by then, so I left my job as a property manager and got qualified to be a home care worker. Caesar moved in with my husband and me. It was a big pay cut, but if I hadn't done that, he would be sent to an institution, and that just can't happen.

My employer, the state of Illinois, only pays me for eight hours of work, but let me tell you it is more than a full time job. Caesar cannot dress himself, though he tries, and picks out some of the strangest outfits. He cannot clean himself, use the restroom on his own, or do many of the everyday things most of us don't even think twice about. I thank God that the state provides so much help for my brother but I could use some help for myself. I, like hundreds of other caregivers in Illinois, have no sick days and no paid time off of any kind.

Three years ago, my husband became very sick. He passed away last April, and before that he needed a lot of care. I had to care for him and my brother at the same time. I couldn't afford to take any unpaid time off to focus on my husband, because the three of us were surviving only on my income.

I know this hearing is about good family policies but everything comes back to money, something nobody seems to have enough of these days. I recently became a member of the Service Employees International Union and now make \$9.85 an hour, a \$1.50 increase from before the union, but it doesn't go very far. I get paid twice a month, one check goes to the rent and the rest, \$926, must go to everything else. After \$200 for the electricity, \$500 for gas and now \$160 for phone and cable TV since we cannot use antennas anymore. The money goes so fast.

You may have noticed I didn't even mention things like food or my church tithes, which always come first. So, we find the places where we can cut back. I am on every payment plan you can imagine and make sure I pay just enough every month so they don't cut off the heat but I never can pay them all off. I constantly have to take from Peter to pay Paul, and had to file for bankruptcy because I just could not pay all my household and medical bills. Now my credit is ruined. I was recently notified that because of budget cuts I might

have my hours cut. That won't cut down on any of the work I have to do, but it would reduce my paycheck, and I don't know how we would manage.

Even though my job is to provide for the health of my Caesar, I do not have health care except for general clinic visits thanks to my union contract. Even then, with no paid sick days and a \$15 co-pay I cannot afford to go very often. I was recently diagnosed with diabetes and the doctor said I had to go on insulin or I would die. I went to get the testing strips, pads and everything else and it cost \$417. I had to ask my family for help just so I could get the medicine I need to live. Now, I have found a way to get my medicine through the county hospital for free but it takes two whole days of sitting and waiting in line for the help. That is two days worth of unpaid time. I do it because I cannot afford to die, but there has to be a less expensive way to live.

My children help me financially whenever they can, but they have children of their own, and now money is tighter than ever. My daughter has nine children, but gave me her stimulus check to help pay for my husband's funeral. I'm sure she could have used the money herself, but I couldn't have afforded it otherwise. Nobody in my family is rich, but whenever someone needs something extra we all put our pennies together as best we can.

My youngest son recently lost his job, laid off because of the economy. He stays with me off and on. He helps watch Ceasar during the day, and looks for work when he can. My daughter in Christ? is in school to be a nurse, and needed a place to stay. So when she offered to stay with my brother so I could come here to address you here in Washington DC, I readily agreed.

I love my brother and I am inspired by him every day, and without fail every time we go to church. But I would like to go to visit my dentist, who I haven't seen in 13 years. I would like to get a real pair of glasses. I would like to be able to afford a mammogram. I would like to know that if I became seriously ill I could take time away from my job having our utilities cut off, or without losing my home, and not have to worry that my brother would end up in an institution. I would like not to have to consider living on a street where I'm afraid to step outside just to lower my rent. My dream is to go back to college and finish my degree in business, and if I had personal days, that would make it much easier for me to do that. In the meantime, I do my best with what I have.

I came here today because I wanted to share my story with you. There are people like me in every town across this country, people who are working hard and doing their best to provide for their families. Our stories are different but our hope is the same – that you help give us change that works. It wouldn't take very much to make a big difference in our lives. We cannot fix everything overnight but we can't give up. I just hope I have helped you find the courage and desire to make that difference. Thank you for your time. God bless you and God bless your work.