

From: Hilary Mortensen  
AFSCME Council 75

To: Chair Shields  
Members of the Oregon Senate Committee on Consumer Protection and General  
Government

RE: Anti-Union Campaign at Early Head Start

May 14, 2013

In November of 2002 my coworkers and I at Early Head Start Family Centers of Portland (EHS) started an organizing campaign to form a union with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). We were a group of about 75 employees, predominately women, that talked with each other during breaks, over the phone and outside of our workplace to discuss the pros and cons of forming a union. We came to the consensus that management did not respect us through their actions of randomly breaking up teaching teams, reassigning us to different classrooms and constantly talking down to us. These reasons were what brought us together to form a union.

By February we had reached out to our coworkers and found that a strong majority felt the same way, so we filed for an election with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) with the help of AFSCME organizers. It was not until June of 2003 that we actually had our election because our director at EHS, Cynthia Wells, decided she needed to investigate whether a union was really something that would benefit the employees.

The first part of her investigation began with a captive audience meeting that was supposed to be a teacher in-service day - a day of training and learning about the state of Head Start and Early Head Start . This was a mandatory meeting. During the meeting she stated that she did not think a union was in the best interest of EHS. Along with that she said she would rather run her "baby" into the ground or quit if a union was formed. After those statements were made the rest of the meeting continued down a very negative path that included insults to anyone she thought might be a union supporter.

In the months following the initial captive audience meeting, Cynthia used public intimidation tactics and thousands of public tax dollars to hire an anti-union law firm. The most emotional and financially costly event was the NLRB hearing that took place. It was five days of hearings and once the EHS board discovered how much Cynthia had spent on retaining the law firm for this purpose she was required to stop using their reserves and had to represent herself/EHS for the last day of the hearing.

This careless use of public funds fulfilled Cynthia's statement of running her "baby" into the ground - EHS no longer exists. Head Start had Community Development Institute (CDI) take over the program to get it financially solvent. Once they achieved

that, the grants that had brought EHS into existence were put up for bid and are now handled by Albina Head Start. In addition to the organization no longer existing, there were no repairs to school sites and a shortage of supplies for the classrooms during her anti-union campaign.

Due to this example of employer interference in a union organizing campaign, the people that loved and made EHS such a wonderful place to work had to seek other employment and the learning environment for the children was compromised both physically and emotionally. Employees have the right to form unions, to have a say over their working conditions, wages and benefits. I do not believe that employers should be able to interfere in that right, or to fight their employees organizing efforts. It's dishonest and an inappropriate use of taxpayer resources, it's not productive or helpful to the people receiving the provided services, and disrespects those striving to give the best back to their community.

Thank you for considering my experience.