

TESTIMONY OF KAREN STEINHAUER DELOACH  
BOOKKEEPER: DIAMOND, CARMICHAEL, GARY, PATTERSON & DUKE, P.A. CPAs

Montgomery, Alabama  
Regarding the Working Families Flexibility Act of 2013  
[H.R. 1406]  
Before the Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections  
U.S. House of Representatives  
April 11, 2013

Good Morning, Chairman Walberg and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Karen DeLoach. I am very grateful for the opportunity to convey my testimony today. I hope that it proves helpful in your determination about the Working Families Flexibility Act of 2013. It is great to live in a country where our government officials **want** to hear the voice of “Jane Q. Public”, I have friends in parts of the world where this is not the case. With that being said, I’ll move to the heart of my story.

I was raised with a strong work ethic and a focus on the importance of family. I became a part of the workforce when I was seventeen years old, and I have worked for nearly all of the last thirty-one years. I married in 1984, and we soon moved from Georgia to Alabama. I was married for nearly seven years and had three children in that marriage. Due to multiple problems that we could not work out, we divorced. I was then a single mother of three for the next seven years. In 1992, my annual income was approximately \$18,000.00 per year. By the grace of God, our family of four survived from paycheck to paycheck and miracle to miracle. Because I was the only parent available for the children, I exhausted my sick and vacation time every year.

Fifteen years ago, I married a wonderful man who had three children of his own, two of them still in college. So we are a blended family, a very well blended family. My husband, James, is a professor at a local university. He teaches Finance, primarily to adults who want to further their education to attain promotions with pay increases. I appreciate that my husband sees this as a way to help entire families have better lives, and I respect him for this contribution to our community. All of our children are adults now, some with children of their own. As a matter of fact, we have six grandchildren now, and we happily look forward to the time that we get to spend with them.

So, now I come to the mention of the Working Families Flexibility Act and how I perceive that it could be a positive step for employees in the private sector. You may wonder why compensatory time could matter to an empty-nester who seems to be in pretty good health. Why would I need more time off from work than the paid sick and vacation time that my employer agreed to allow annually? Well, I’ve learned in the last several years that there can still be many unforeseen needs in addition to any planned break from the routine. One such case involves my youngest sister and her family who live in Montgomery. My brother-in-law’s family owns Central Alabama Greenhouse, which is a small business. Fourteen years ago, yesterday, they were blessed with their first-born child, Katie. My niece is a vivacious little girl who was born with special needs. They make numerous trips to Children’s Hospital in Birmingham for routine checks and sometimes more serious things. My sister must have someone who is capable of operating Katie’s feeding tube, to travel with them for these appointments. Because the Greenhouse business can have very busy seasons, her husband cannot go to all of the appointments. I want to be available for those times when my sister asks me for help, because they are so important to me.

It was actually that sister and brother-in-law who introduced me to the accounting firm where I now work. I started working at Diamond, Carmichael, Gary, Patterson and Duke, (then with fewer partners) in

September of 2006. They are a great establishment to work for and are willing to be flexible about my time, but only as flexible as the law allows. I am in hopes that this bill passes and allows my employer to offer greater flexibility to the employees. From August 2011 through October 2012, I worked full time to help my church, East Memorial Baptist, before returning to Diamond, Carmichael where I am still employed.

In the summer of 2007, after listening to a presentation on missions at church, I felt strongly that I must get involved. I was overwhelmingly compelled to go and participate in international missions. During the summer of 2008, I went on my first mission trip to Nicaragua. We brought reading glasses as well as some household items to families in remote areas. More important than the material things that we brought, was the time that we spent with people there. People were free to talk about their problems, and I was able to encourage them, pray with them and tell them how Jesus Christ has changed my life. I have gone back to Nicaragua each year, many times to unfamiliar areas, working with local pastors and bringing shoes, clothes, and other items to them. I still see that the time spent playing with children, or encouraging mothers who are worried about the futures of their children are more precious to them than objects. I am thankful that I have the opportunity to go and serve, even if it means taking time off without pay. Working as a bookkeeper means that certain times of the year, such as the quarterly payroll tax return months, are much busier than other times of the year. If I work overtime in April, for example, I would like to have the option of choosing to reserve that time to be taken off from work as compensatory time rather than making extra money in April and then taking leave without pay in June or July, when participating in missions.

Mission trips are a wonderful way to serve others and to learn about different cultures in the world. I was raised to believe that it is important to assist others. In my community, I am a volunteer on the Elmore County Juvenile Conference Committee (or EJCC). The EJCC was formed to help the youth in our community who have gotten into trouble with a first offense/non-violent crime. Our District Court Judge, Maura Culberson refers eligible cases to the committee. We hope to learn something about the young people who come through our program in order to help them and their parents engage in new behaviors that will help change the course of their lives for a brighter future. The EJCC develops constructive sanctions that are tailored to the family's needs. Although the monthly committee meetings are held during the evening, there is an annual luncheon and training session which takes one half of a work day each March. This year, I did not attend the full session because I had not yet accrued the vacation time needed to do so.

Now, I come to the part of my testimony that reveals more about what drives this issue home for me. In 2009, I got a phone call from my sister-in law in Columbus, GA. She told me that there was an emergency at the hospital. My older brother, Jay, had respiratory failure while in the E.R. admissions office. While they were able to revive him, he had to be intubated ... that is put on a respirator. He was only fifty years old at the time, and through the combination of a congenital heart defect and decades of cigarette smoking, his body was rapidly shutting down, one system at a time. My sister and I dropped everything and went directly to the hospital, an hour and a half away. Our father traveled over five hours to be at his side. My brother was in the ICU for one full month. When someone is in ICU, the visiting hours are extremely limited and yet I knew that I needed to be there as much as possible for my brother. Waking up connected to a respirator was horrifying for him. He was scared and he needed family to be there. His wife was overwrought with emotion and could not handle this on her own. The hospital had called for the palliative care specialist to come in because they believed that he would not leave that hospital alive. I believe that seeing family present in the room with him, praying for him, singing to him and encouraging him all helped turn things around for my brother in 2009. At this time, I could not tell you how much time I missed from work; I only know that my sister and I alternated days in the hospital with Jay and he was able to walk again, breathe again and live at home again. In June of 2012, our

brother passed away. No amount of money would have been worth missing the chance to be there for my brother in his time of need.

Right now, committee members, you have the ability to empower families across the nation with the freedom of choice. You could afford me the freedom to choose to use my overtime as leave time, while my coworker can still choose overtime pay, if she likes.

In the last three years, my mother, my brother, my father-in-law and one of my sons-in-law have all passed away, some at relatively early ages. I am not getting any younger, and neither is the rest of the world so yes, I say again, time is precious to me. I would greatly appreciate the option at work to **choose** between being compensated in dollars or days.

Given that the public sector has utilized this plan for nearly thirty years and continues to keep it in place leads me to think that our government already deems this a viable plan. Since the bill includes a provision whereby it will cease to exist after five years unless Congress extends it or makes it permanent, I believe that it comes with its own 'safety valve' of sorts. This bill offers flexibility not a mandate.

Thank you for your time today and for the freedom to express my personal story.