



EQUALITY WORKS
A Program of Legal Momentum



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE WOMEN'S ISSUES COMMITTEE OF THE NEW
YORK CITY COUNCIL**

September 20, 2007

Hearing: **Are There Enough Non-Traditional Employment Opportunity for
Women in New York City?**

Cheryl Farrell
Electrician, Local 3, 19 years
Shop Steward

My name is Cheryl Farrell. I am an A-journey-woman electrician and Shop Steward. I am a member of Local Union #3 International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and have over 19 years experience in the trades. I was one of the founding members of the Amber Light Society, a non-profit organization for women electricians in Local Union #3 and I served as the president for the past six years. I am an activist in my union as well as other community-based organizations.

I am currently pursuing a B.S. in Labor Studies. I am the proud mother of a daughter who's following in my footsteps as an electrician. She will be an A-journeywoman in two months. I also have two brothers who are electricians in Local Union #3.

I went into the non-traditional field because I was a divorced mother with two daughters. I had a job without any medical or dental benefits and very low wages. My brother Carlos, an electrician, encouraged me to join Local Union #3 to become an electrician.

One of the best things about being an electrician is going to different work sites. I've worked at Madison Square Garden, the Arthur Ashe Stadium, the Convention Center, the Mercantile Building directly after 911 and Kennedy Space Center in Florida. I've also worked at some not so pleasant jobs, like when I worked in a manhole with huge water bugs. I have had the pleasure of seeing many projects from the beginning to completion. I also get to interact with many different people. I especially enjoy working with apprentices. That's when I get an opportunity to teach the skills that I've learned over the past nineteen years.

OPL is an independent voice for tradeswomen that receives administrative support from Legal Momentum. The views and actions of this group do not necessarily represent those of Legal Momentum.

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There are two things I dislike most about the jobsites. I don't have a clean bathroom to use. Often, when I finally locate one, the general contractors' secretaries have the key and won't give tradeswomen a copy. I try not to drink many fluids throughout the day because of this. The other issue is a proper work shanty to change my clothing and secure my personal items. This makes for a tough start of my workday and can put me in a poor state of mind.

As a union electrician I make \$46.00 an hour plus free medical, free dental, free pension benefits and a free college education. I can take my skills and my union card and work anywhere in the U.S. and Canada.

All jobs have challenges and being an electrician is no different. You have to prove you can do the work assigned to you. Most of the jobs include lifting and carrying heavy things, climbing ladders and working with electricity which can kill you. I don't have to solicit work in my union because Local Union #3 has a hiring hall on site. I've been a foreman for many years and currently a shop steward. As far as discrimination is concerned it's not tolerated in Local Union #3 I.B.E.W. I want women to join unions so they can achieve ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE.