



**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?**

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My name is Yvette Dennis and I am the Labor Compliance Officer for The Darman Group, Inc. The construction trade is in my blood. I grew up watching my father and his brothers working in just about every area of the construction industry. My uncle had a plumbing company and my father was a consultant in construction management. I spent some of my working life as a secretary, retail sales associate and convenience store then later a fast food restaurant manager. My entry into the industry came when the Elevators & Escalator, Local 1 responded to community demands to hire women. I joined the union, there were four women and I was the only black woman in the Local. As a field worker I built elevators and escalators for two years and then I left the industry to raise my daughter.

Increasing the numbers of women entering the construction field is only addressing a portion of the problem. Unless the issues affecting women already in the industry are addressed, the numbers of tradeswomen will remain low. As a Labor Compliance Officer, my job is to ensure that women, minorities and community members work on construction sites. I maintain referral lists and contacts from which to recruit workers and I work closely with contractors, subcontractors, supervisors and foremen to make sure a good proportion of minorities, women and community members work on site.

The developer's support is crucial. Currently my main work is for Forest City Ratner (FCR). FCR sets up pre-work meetings to remind all contractors and sub contractors about their contractual obligations to diversity. I am introduced to the

contractors at those meetings as the person enforcing their contractual obligations and I answer any questions they may have regarding the program at that time. When I work a site I exceed the FCR requirement of 25% combined community and women's workforce participation. On the New York Times building, we achieved a 15% female participation.

I walk on the construction sites daily to make sure that the reports that contractors make are accurate. I check that there are bathrooms and changing shanties for women as well as for the men. I make sure that all workers are treated fairly and I monitor them to make sure they are working properly. I also meet with the contractors' representatives on the site on a weekly basis. If I point out to someone at those meetings that they are out of compliance in hiring women, minority or community members, they are expected to immediately ask me to send them what is needed by the morning.

I have heard just about every excuse about why they can't hire women, or community members or minorities. Sometimes contractors will hire the people I send them and then constantly find something wrong hoping to wear me out. Often they do this to workers I have used on other sites for many years – with no complaints about their work. I usually give these contractors three strikes before going back to FCR and having them enforce the contractual penalties for non-compliance.

We need more real compliance officers supported by a compliance regulation or policy that they have to meet. If these policies and people were in place, then a lot of the

prejudices and the deficiencies that are common on construction sites would not exist because it would be well established that these behaviors would not be tolerated. Every FCR site demands compliance and they uphold their policies and support me so that my work is effective. This is the practice that should occur on all construction sites. Contractually enforced equal opportunity goals and a monitor who enforces them and is fully supported by the owner of the site.