



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?**

Angela Olszewski
Tiler, Local 7

My name is Angela Olszewski and I am a 1999 Graduate of Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW). With NEW's assistance in February of 2000, I was able to secure a spot in an apprenticeship with Local Union No. 7, Tile Marble & Terrazzo. I am very proud to be a union construction worker. This pride and enthusiasm for my work, which most often includes installing marble and granite, often affords me the opportunity to work on more complicated and intricate work assignments. For the last 5 years, I also worked as NEW's Job Readiness instructor in their evening training program. I am grateful at having the opportunity to help more women to connect to unionized construction work.

There is great satisfaction in knowing that hour for hour each worker; man or woman, in a particular Local Union is earning the same money for the same work. However, I will not claim this as a victory. Certain job placements provide greater access to overtime pay than others, thereby giving certain workers a greater overall earning potential than others. Furthermore, most pension credits are earned and are based on overall work hours during a period of each year. Under this system some workers earn under a full credit while others may earn more. Access to the union health insurance hangs in the balance of this same system. Workers need to work a minimum number of hours in a given period to have health insurance in the next period. I would like to be guaranteed that women's overall wages, pension credits, and access to health insurance are keeping pace with the wages, pension and benefits of their male co-workers. The United States Supreme Court's Decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.* makes this issue even more compelling.

The financial gains of working in a non-traditional field have been significant. I often point out to an audience like this that I now pay in taxes what I used to earn for a living. These days, I have to amend that statement because I now pay even more.

More women should have access to these jobs because they provide living wages, access to on the job training and health insurance. Some apprenticeships offer higher starting salaries than jobs offered to college grads. Most people must go into debt to attend college. College is not for everyone and neither are jobs in construction. Most importantly, as a citizen of a free nation I am especially proud as a woman to live out my freedoms and demonstrate that women can do construction work.

I would like to present to you another challenge faced by women in construction – unequal access to bathrooms. It is the custom that women on the job are assigned one bathroom that is kept locked, with only the women having the key or combination to that lock. It is also the practice that throughout a high-rise construction site, there are temporary bathrooms for worker use spread out every 5 or 8 floors. None of these bathrooms are designated as women's bathrooms, and they are often not as secure as the bathrooms provided for women or designed to provide any privacy. I have been on jobs where there was not even a door in the bathroom and someone could come around a corner and happen upon someone else using the bathroom. In cases where there is a door, there is generally no way of locking it to ensure privacy. Workers will attempt to twine wires around screws, which inevitably break off and ultimately do not secure the door. I have had such a door pulled open.

These temporary bathrooms frequently become fouled-up and unusable. Additionally, they often become places for pornographic and racist graffiti. Some of the

most disturbing versions of the graffiti that I see on sites involve depictions of a woman's genitals with actual nails or screws driven into them for effect and not for any practical purpose. The one that has really seared into my brain, was one in which there was a depiction of a woman's genitals where someone had used bubble gum to give the depiction an added dimension, but what really was so disturbing was that someone had extinguished their cigarette in this rendering of a woman's genitals. The presence of the pornographic graffiti and the inadequate sanitary conditions for workers are the catalyst for producing hostile work environments for women.

Men will resort to urinating in the corners of the work site or into bottles that are strewn about the job. As a tile setter I work in the unfinished bathrooms intended for the owners of that dwelling and not for workers' use. These unfinished bathrooms do not contain toilets, but it is often an unauthorized practice that men will urinate in the new tubs or shower pans. The room will often reek of urine.

I have on occasion requested that the GC provide more than the standard one locked bathroom for women. It has been my experience that my co-workers and the GC's think that it's a form of special treatment that women have a bathroom with a lock. GC's have also said they couldn't provide more than one locked bathroom for women because it is too expensive. This is not a special request. I want both men and women to have adequate and equal facilities on job sites. Construction workers in NYC build one of the most expensive housing markets on the planet. Surely the GC can afford to split the waste line and build two plywood shacks instead of one. Recently, I was working at 10 Barclay Street, a 55 story residential high-rise. On occasion it would take me almost an hour to travel from the 35th floor to my designated restroom on the ground. This has a

significant impact on my ability to be a productive worker. I cannot keep up with a worker who can urinate in a bottle and never lose time by leaving his workstation.

I ask for your help in persuading the industry that these conditions are unacceptable, both for the men who are unable to have adequate facilities and for the women to have an unequal number of facilities. When I build commercial high-rises, which has included 7 World Trade, architects never take into consideration how many women and how many men will be working at the site in order to determine how many restrooms to build for each gender.? I would also like to point out I have heard from my sisters who work in police, fire, transit, and utility accounts that some facilities provided to workers in these other trades are also unequal.

Respectfully,

Angela Olszewski