

Good morning. My name is Michelle Durham, and I'm a mom from Arab, Alabama. I want to thank Congresswoman Bonamici, Congressman Comer, and the subcommittee members for having me here today.

I've lived my whole life in Alabama and yesterday was the first time I've ever been on a plane. It was a little scary, but I was glad to make the trip. I want you to know what happened to me when I became pregnant four years ago.

They say that pregnancy is supposed to be a time of happiness but my pregnancy was filled with anxiety and fear because my employer sent me home, without pay, right when I needed a paycheck the most. That's not the way things should be.

In March 2015, when I was 22 years old, I began working for Rural/Metro Corporation in Gadsden, Alabama. I was an Emergency Medical Technician, or EMT. It was my first job after getting my EMT certificate, and I was excited to start my career.

My plan was to gain experience and save up so that I could continue my training and eventually become a paramedic.

About six months after I started working for Rural/Metro, I learned I was pregnant with my first child. During one of my first pre-natal appointments, I was told that I shouldn't lift anything over 50 pounds.

Because my job required me to lift patients and stretchers, I knew that I would have to ask Rural/Metro to temporarily reassign me so that I could follow my health provider's orders.

I didn't think it would be a problem because I knew that Rural/Metro had a policy of giving light duty jobs to EMTs when they had problems like a back injury. I also knew that they had dispatcher jobs available that I could do and that wouldn't involve any lifting.

But I was so, so wrong. My manager told me that the company only gave light duty jobs to EMTs who had been injured while working. He said my only option was to take an unpaid leave of absence. The HR department backed him up, telling me I had to go home.

I was shocked. I wanted to work because I loved my job and I needed the income. All I could think about was: how am I supposed to live for six months without a paycheck? How could I buy what I needed for my baby's birth? I was so afraid for him, and for me.

I soon realized I needed help and called a lawyer in Birmingham, Heather Leonard. She contacted the company and told them that what they were doing was illegal, and that a recent Supreme Court decision was on my side. But Rural/Metro never even responded to her.

After that, we went to the EEOC, and then to court. My experience in the court system has been tough. The judge ruled against me and my case is on appeal. I'm grateful that the ACLU has joined my legal team and is helping me.

But the truth is, I didn't want to hire a lawyer or go to court. I just wanted to keep working.

After Rural/Metro forced me to take leave in September 2015, I was unemployed for about seven months. I looked hard for a job but couldn't find one. I couldn't pay my rent, and had to move in with my grandmother. I was excited about meeting my baby, but his upcoming birth terrified me. I worried all the time about how I would provide for him. I racked up a lot of credit card debt to take care of me and my son and to repay the loans I'd taken out for my EMT

training. And I still have a hospital bill from when I gave birth in March 2016 because I didn't have health coverage.

I eventually found a job in a factory, but it didn't come with overtime or benefits like my Rural/Metro job did, and I later took a second job in a fast-food restaurant. Recently I changed jobs again, and am now the manager of a pet store. I still don't have health insurance and my son has Medicaid.

My son Aedan is now three years old and he's my greatest joy. I wouldn't trade being his mom for anything. But I'll never get back those months before and after he was born, when all I could think about was everything that I was losing because I was pregnant.

I hope that Congress passes the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act because what happened to me was wrong. Women and families need a law that will tell their employer that they have to explore different options that will help pregnant workers keep their jobs. Employers should not be able to just say "NO" when a pregnant worker asks for a temporary job change.

Please use the power you have to help pregnant workers take care of themselves, their babies, and their families. Thank you very much for listening to my story.