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Scholarship

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The Power of a Voice

Labor unions in Hawaii are important because it brings communities together and enables workers to fight for better working conditions. Because of labor unions, the employees or workers have their rightfully owned privileges in their working environment. From personal experience, Labor Unions have helped my family, especially my mom.

As a daughter of a housekeeper, I am well aware of the importance of labor unions in Hawaii. One of the reasons why my mother is a housekeeper is because it comes with so many benefits such as medical insurance. My whole family is covered under my mother's name for our medical insurance. My mother, Janice Butin, is a housekeeper at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel; a luxury hotel. She has been working at the hotel since October 7, 2010, and I am aware of how difficult the job is. Especially when she comes home fully drained with severe body aches. The amount of energy that the housekeeping occupation requires is a lot and although my mom does not necessarily enjoy her job, she still does the best to make sure that the guests stay in the hotel is as comfortable as it can be. She works hard to make sure that all the rooms she cleans are done on time and are of quality so that she meets the satisfaction of her guests no matter the circumstances.

Recently, in the year 2019, the hotel workers went on a strike that lasted 51 days which happened to be the second-longest strike in Hawaii's hotel industry in history. They were fighting for an increase in pay. And with the perseverance of the employees, they were able to negotiate and agree on a 4-year contract that satisfied their needs. According to People's World, the contract includes a reduced workload for housekeepers, better pension, a \$6.13 per hour pay, job security, and a child and elder care fund. (Press Associates Union News Service 2019). My mother knew how important it was to get this contract so over the 51 days of strike, she attended all the rallies whether it was early in the morning or in the middle of the day because it meant a lot to her that she and her coworkers get the benefits they rightfully deserve. She made sure her coworkers took part in the strike to ensure a stronger voice in obtaining the contract. I witnessed her numerous times reprimanding and giving lectures to her coworkers who were simply "too lazy" to attend the rallies. Getting the contract was significant to her because she knows how difficult housekeeping is, especially in a luxury hotel. When they got the decision, she was so relieved and glad because her persistence paid off. She also took part in the negotiations because she was a representative or a delegate for Local 5 Union.

I took part in one of the rallies where a number of hotel workers walked around Waikiki chanting their words and using their voices to protest and be heard. One chant I vividly remember saying is "One Job Should Be Enough." It was a great experience because I got to be a part of a community that really cared about their jobs. There were a lot of participants and it was so shocking to me because Waikiki is already normally filled with people during the day but with the rally, there were even more people. At the end of the walk around Waikiki, there was a group of people in the front of the beach shore talking to their people through a megaphone and

encouraging everybody that this too shall pass; that their efforts do not go unnoticed. Overall it was a great experience to be part of something so huge and important to my mom and a lot of other hotel workers.

In my sophomore year in high school, I was fortunate enough to be invited to a door-drop activity that was organized by the Justice Club in Waipahu High School. The Justice Club takes part in being part of the events and activities that help people. The activity that took place was partnered with the Local 5 union. I was really excited because my mom was currently a delegate at the time and it involved going into the Hyatt Centric Hotel, which was not part of a union at the time, and sliding flyers under the hotel room doors. The flyer consisted of information about how the hotel workers are being treated in that hotel. It felt great to be a part of something that could help a community. Not so long after the activity, my fellow door-droppers and I got to meet some of the hotel workers that worked at the Hyatt Centric Hotel and they showed us their gratitude by thanking us for our efforts. This activity taught me to do something good for others whether it be someone you know or a complete stranger.

In conclusion, without the efforts of the hotel workers going on strike and rallies, the hotel workers under the employer Kyo-ya would not have the benefits that they do today. Big corporations will pay attention when people come together to construct a strong voice and allow themselves to be heard. If it weren't for unions the workers will have to accept all the working conditions and pay that the employer gives regardless of whether it is unfair or not. I am thankful for the efforts of the Local 5 union. It shows that they really care about their people and that people should use their voices more often to be heard loud and clear.