

Testimony of Poultry Worker under the pseudonym of “Bernarda Lopez “  
Green Forest, Arkansas  
November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021

My name is Bernarda Lopez. I am originally from Guatemala. I have lived in Arkansas for 24 years and I've been working in different Tyson plants for over 20 years. I am currently working in the Tyson plant in Green Forest, Arkansas. During these years I've been doing different jobs. I am currently working in d-bone department. My job became much more dangerous during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, I was very afraid of what could happen to us. I worked shoulder to shoulder next to my coworkers. When the economy closed, we had to continue our work because we were named “essential workers”. It has always been common for workers to go to work while sick to avoid getting disciplinary points for missing work.

In March, the company told us that we could bring our own mask. I saw many workers selling cloth masks because many did not have one, but the company did not make it mandatory. They also began to check the temperature manually with a device. It wasn't until October 2020 that they gave us masks and made it mandatory to wear the mask inside the plant. In July, they put a scanner to take the temperature but there were workers without symptoms that could pass through the scanner and infect others within the plant. Then, they began to put up plastic dividers and then metal dividers. The reality was that we were still working shoulder to shoulder. Our head came out of those dividers to be able to process the chicken properly, so those dividers were useless. They also put them in the dining room but in fact, we all gathered in the hallways to enter the floor and to go to the bathroom, and because of that, we never felt safe with those dividers.

I was constantly worried because my husband was convalescent due to a surgery he had and I didn't want him to get sick of COVID. The company did not tell us anything about the cases that began to appear. We only saw that people began to miss work but they never told us the reason, much less if we were exposed. On June 10, I began to have some symptoms of headache and I felt very tired. When I informed my supervisor, she would not let me go home. She told me that if I left they would give me a point to which I accepted because I felt bad. The next day I went back to work because I did not want to get another point because I did not want to accumulate more points because I didn't want to get fired. I went to a clinic and they tested me for COVID. I learned that I was positive for COVID on June 12th.

Inevitably, my husband was infected and passed away almost immediately. I lost him on June 18th while being hospitalized with severe symptoms. It was one of the most difficult moments of my life because I could not go to the hospital to see him since I was still sick at home. I was very lonely and now I still have difficulty paying his medical bills since we lost a lot of money during this situation.

When I returned to work, I saw that many more workers were still getting sick and there was a shortage of workers, and we still had to keep on working with fewer people and line speeds faster than before.

After a year of what happened to me, I am sure that many losses could have been saved if the company had protected us more against the virus. But we always knew that they cared more about their earnings than the lives of the workers.