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Kentucky Hearthside Employee Illegally Fired for Union Activity

London, Ky. — Eleven-year employee Ben Nolan of the Hearthside Food Solutions (HFS) bakery in London, Ky. has been illegally fired from his job for activities related to organizing a Union.

Hearthside is owned by two private equity companies, Partners Group and Charlesbank.

Nolan was unjustly targeted by management at the bakery when he emerged as a leader in an April 2024 Union organizing campaign. “Ben was extremely dedicated to protecting the legal rights of the workers during the campaign,” reports BCTGM International Representative Lisa Gregory, who led the organizing effort in London. “As a member of the committee, he took seriously the responsibility of protecting others against harassment, educating the workers about the Union and promoting the campaign on social media,” Gregory says.

On September 10, the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) hosted a panel at the Council of Institutional Investors Conference in New York City to point to the growing number of investors calling upon private equity companies for more accountability, increased focus on human capital and the right to freedom of association.

BCTGM International Executive Assistant to the President Matthew Clark spoke on the panel about HFS as a portfolio company of private equity owners Partners Group and Charlesbank, and Nolan briefly delivered remarks on the workers’ campaign for a Union. “Partners Group and Charlesbank have a responsibility to protect these workers,” asserted Clark at the Conference. “As far as we are concerned, they are directly accountable for the despicable actions of the company’s managers and supervisors,” Clark said.

Nolan was suspended the next day, and fired the following week.

Hearthside is one of the largest baking companies in North America, specializing in co-manufacturing branded products for other food companies—including BCTGM-represented companies like Mondelez/Nabisco, Kellogg’s and General Mills.

The BCTGM is also engaged in organizing drives at HFS facilities in Michigan City, Ind. and McComb, Ohio. Upon hearing of Nolan’s firing, BCTGM International President Anthony Shelton stated, “Our Union remains fully committed to the protection of Hearthside workers’ rights under federal labor law, and that includes new charges filed this week against Hearthside for the illegal firing of Ben Nolan.”

“This company has committed every tactic in the world toward Union avoidance—their only goal is to line the pockets of their greedy investors,” Shelton continued. “We will do everything in our power to ensure the workers at all Hearthside facilities have a chance at a fair Union election, free from retaliation and retribution,” he concluded.