

Oct 13, 2012

OCT 18 2012

The Honorable Shelly C. Chapman,

My name is Willie Lee Harmon and I am a retiree of Peabody / Patriot Coal. I retired in April 2002 due to back injury pain after working for 36 years in the coal industry.

I started working at age 18 years and had to come out of the mines due to many health issues including Black Lung. Currently, I have been awarded Black Lung benefits and have oxygen in my home. I am unable to walk any distance without having shortness of breath and back pain.

I have worked totally in the mines since 1966 and continued until 2002 at age 54. I have done about every job there is to do in the mining industry. My last 28 years I worked as a certified electrician. I have been exposed to all types of health hazards over the years, including many carcinogens in the oils and grease and other fluids used to maintain the equipment as well as breathing coal dust.

In 2006 I was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma and had surgery at Duke University in North Carolina to remove the tumor in my kidney.

In 2002 I had surgery on my back due to the many accidents while working in lifting situations. I am still seeing my doctor for this.

My other health issues include; elevated blood pressure and cholesterol, depression, chronic acid reflux and chronic arthritis. I take medication for all of these conditions as well as hydrocodone as needed for my back pain.

Also, my wife of 45 years is my dependent who is also in need of my health care coverage. She worked as a nurse for 15 years before having to have both knees totally replaced in 1996. She is still having follow-up visits occasionally with her doctor. She was diagnosed in 2007 with type 2 diabetes. Most recently, she was diagnosed with cancer of the thyroid and had surgery. She is still having follow-up visits for this as well as starting on a new medication. Her other health issues include elevated blood pressure and cholesterol, chronic arthritis, acid reflux all of which are treated with medication.

I humbly ask you, as judge in this case to consider changing the venue of this case to Charleston, WV. Me and others in my health situation cannot attend a court as important as this, so far away from home. It is an important case that concerns all coal miners who worked all of their best, young years in an important industry.

It would be totally devastating to have our health care taken away from us at this time of our lives

I worked 36 years and endured many, many hardships to complete my service to the company so that at the end of my years I would have health care for myself and for my wife as was promised to retired coal miners.

Thank you for reading my story.

Sincerely,
Willie Lee Harmon
Retired Coal Miner