



Senate Committee on Finance  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Hatch, Ranking Member Wyden, and other distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Aretha J. Jackson. I was born in Prince George's County, Maryland. I grew up in the projects of Washington, D.C. and am a graduate of District public schools. I served in the United States Army, Army Reserves, and the District of Columbia Army National Guard. I have an Associate of Arts Degree in Liberal Arts and Graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology.

I have struggled with poverty my entire life. I have been homeless twice in my life; a single parent of two; and have received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families a number of times in multiple states including Hawaii and the District of Columbia. I am a Disabled Veteran, currently in my second year of training as a Veteran Service Representative in the Pension Management Center at the Department of Veteran Affairs in Philadelphia, PA.

My personal experiences with the TANF program varies based on time, place, and regulations. The one thing that remained consistent was the negative attitude of most of the individuals that work as examiners. The attitude was one of superiority.

As you know the program has evolved over the years. I first started receiving welfare in 1991. It was not difficult to get food stamps and cash assistance. The housing assistance program in D.C. helped me with my security deposit and furniture for my first apartment. The program focused on getting my basic needs met which allowed me to focus on my child and getting back into the workforce.

In 2001 after getting pregnant with my son, I quit my job and reapplied for public assistance, this time in Maryland. The program in Maryland told me of all of the regulations and requirements I was to meet, but did not offer a plan of action to accomplish these unrealistic goals. Because my house foreclosed I had to move back in with my mother in Washington, D.C., thus closing my case with Maryland and opening a TANF case with the District. I was enrolled in a resume writing class - the programs back then (2001) were OK.

I returned to work after September 11. In 2003, my mother put my children and me out and we lived in temporary housing on Bolling Air Force base and then moved to housing in Fort Myers.

A few months later I was homeless again. I was not equipped to help myself or anyone else at that time. In 2006 I got married and reenlisted in the United States Army. By 2007 I had gone to war and got a divorce.

In 2009, I was discharged from active duty because my family care plan failed. Once again I found myself unemployed, and in need of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. This time I was in Hawaii and the program was totally different. I was required to volunteer 30 hours per week after completing workshops to help me build a resume, improve interviewing techniques, conduct job search, and negotiate salaries. I enrolled in college and was allowed to attend class in lieu of volunteer work.

After graduating college I moved back to D.C. and applied for the Clinical Psychology program at Argosy University in Roslyn VA. This is where I learned that I was experiencing PTSD, anxiety and depression. I failed a very important class and was removed from the program. Once again I needed help. **This time the TANF program was different from every other time.** I was required to attend America Works of Washington, D.C. in order to keep receiving assistance.

America Works is an organization that assists individual in finding employment. But this program also helps in a way no other program has. The employees at America Works helped me to see myself as a productive person again. I was able to share personal information with Jennifer Tiller that kept me from committing suicide and together we were able to get me the services I needed from the VA. Employers visited America Works weekly, interviewed candidates, and hired people all of the time. There is a glory bell in the lobby for individuals that get a job to ring. Every time the bell went off you could feel the joy in the air. Jennifer was tough on all of us, at the same time she showed that she cared. The information and partnership America Works provided helped me to obtain full time employment with the VA.

TANF program across the nation need assistance. If we had more organizations like America Works of Washington, D.C. people would be more willing to return to work.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.