

**TESTIMONY OF MARY FRANK
OCTOBER 11, 2001**

Thank you for inviting me to speak to all of you today. It is truly an honor for me to have the opportunity to represent the lives of so many people. As you listen to my testimony today, please think about the many single parents that are trying to break the welfare cycle just like me. You as policy makers can provide the additional supports that are necessary to help people become truly self-sufficient.

I am a 38 year old, proud single mother of 2 children. My son, Marcus, is 18 years old and is a High School Senior. My daughter, Rebecca, is 16 years old. Rebecca became pregnant last year and is now the mother of my 20-month-old granddaughter. Rebecca dropped out of high school due to her pregnancy, but is enrolled in a GED program.

I have been receiving public assistance for about 11 years. I am here representing many individuals that are striving to be self-sufficient. The desire to be self-sufficient and be a role model for my children and grandchildren has always been my goal. Being on welfare is like being in prison – and you can't just bust out when you want. My mother was also on public assistance for about 2 years when I was young. I can remember my mother working 2 jobs, day and night to provide for my well being.

I have a HS diploma and have completed a Teacher's Aide course. I started receiving services from Goodwill Industries of Acadiana's Job Connection in 1998. This Goodwill Job Connection is located in a rural community about 30 miles outside of Lafayette. My OFS caseworker referred me to Goodwill for Job Readiness Training. Through Goodwill's program, I realized that life is too short for sitting at home doing nothing, accomplishing nothing, and most of all being nothing. I learned that I have the inner strength to better myself and teach my kids responsibility. I was able to receive Goodwill's services at no charge because the organization uses a business model. Goodwill's retail stores generate money that is used in providing community services.

When I graduated from Goodwill's Job Connection program, I found a job as a cashier. I live in a rural area that does not have public transportation, so I had to ride with a transportation provider. Getting to work everyday was hit or miss, because the transportation provider was not always reliable. Dealing with them was a waste of time and money. I often had to let my voice be heard just to get them to pick me up and often times they would pick me up late or 3 hours before I had to arrive to work. On occasions I had to wait 3-4 hours after working an 8-hour day to be brought home.

I ended up accepting a job that I felt offered me more opportunities financially and vocationally. I changed jobs because I thought it would help me achieve self-sufficiency. The only problem was that once I started this job, all of my benefits were either stopped or reduced. I lost all cash assistance and the medical card. I still was able to receive food stamps but they were significantly

reduced. My job at the time did not offer a benefits package so I had no health insurance for my children or me. Also, I was approaching my 1-year limit with the transportation provider – so I had to find another way to work. I did purchase a car but I would often have problems with it. Because I was raising two children, I was able to take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit.

For some time, I was no longer eligible for childcare assistance for Rebecca because she was over 12 years old. Sometimes I feel that if Rebecca had adequate supervision, then she wouldn't have gotten pregnant. Times were rough – but I was determined to make it. I continued getting services from Goodwill's Job Connection to increase my skills. I completed their computer-training course, which helped me get a promotion on my job. I was given a computer to take home after successfully completing the computer-training course. Having this computer has allowed me not only to maintain my skills, but more importantly has helped my children to keep up with current technology being used at their schools.

At this time, I am working full-time to support my family. My daughter is not eligible for any public assistance until she is 18 years old so it has been difficult. I look at my daughter and granddaughter for inspiration. I want them to have a better life and more opportunities. I do continue to receive Food Stamps, but that is all.

Due to being on assistance, I did not get any child support payments for Marcus. The state takes part of your child support if you are on assistance. When I stopped getting assistance, Marcus ended up with \$256.00 out of \$1443.00 that his father paid. I can tell you that many fathers are discouraged in making child support payments because they see it going to the government. Rebecca's father does provide financial child support assistance.

My choice is to not be on assistance at all and that is what I am striving for. It has taken me 2 ½ years to transition off of welfare to this point. I have my own car, my job, and my life. There is still work to be done and I am not totally there yet. I am scheduled to renew my teacher's aide license so I can pursue my career goal of teaching. I am now working as a cashier because I need an income to support my family.

The government programs help a lot of people, but sometimes it seems that they don't want you to succeed. Some of the issues that affect transitioning from welfare dependence to self-sufficiency are:

- Child Care Assistance – I was no longer eligible for childcare assistance when my daughter turned 12 years old. I was very concerned about her during this time because she was not getting adequate supervision and was getting into trouble. She had her own child at 16 years old, however she is not eligible for assistance until she is 18 years old. I am now supporting 2 families – my daughters and mine.

- Transportation – I was fortunate enough to be eligible for transportation services to get to work. There were many participants in Goodwill's Job Connection program that were not eligible because they had not been on welfare long enough according to the criteria. I did ride with the transportation provider for 1 year, however they were not very reliable. I was fortunate to maintain my employment as long I did.
- Child Support – I was not able to receive child support payments for Marcus or Rebecca while I was on assistance. – payments were being made, but federal and state government was keeping them. This was frustrating to their fathers and put a strain on the relationships.

I hope my testimony has given you a deeper insight to what is involved in transitioning off of welfare. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.