

Finance Committee Testimony

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for asking me to testify today. My name is Linda Anderson, and I have worked as a Human Resource Recruiter at Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines, Iowa for the past six years.

I have a Bachelor's Degree in Education and a Master's Degree in Counseling and Personnel. In my previous work history, I have taught High School in Syracuse, New York and worked as a County Social Worker in Albany, New York. I have worked in healthcare for the past 17 years both as a Director of Volunteer Services and in Human Resources.

During the previous 3 years, I have served as a contact with Promise Jobs (the Welfare to Work Program). I have participated in Job Fairs and interviewed applicants. In my role as a Recruiter, I screen applicants for positions in the hospital-both entry level and professional. It is in this capacity that I am able to describe some of the challenges and successes associated with moving individuals from assistance to meaningful employment.

Some challenges that applicants face are related to both Child Care and transportation. In the hospital, many entry level jobs require that individuals work every other week-end. A barrier that some applicants, including those in Promise Jobs, face is that there is no public transportation on Sundays. Counselors at Workforce Development assist applicants with the resolution of those potential barriers.

Applications also face challenges related to Child Care. Mercy provides an accredited Child Development Center for employees. It is open for both first and second shift employees until midnight Monday through Friday. On-site child care assists prospective employees cope with arranging for child care when working second shift. This is advantageous because the second shift pays a differential so the salary is higher.

The availability of close, reliable and reasonably priced Day Care eliminates a potential barrier to employment and increases availability of potential jobs. There are, however, income levels that Promise Jobs determines for the subsidy of child care costs. This can put some applicants in the difficult position of not earning enough money to cover total child care costs while at the same time losing their child care subsidy.

Since Mercy pays well above minimum wage, there was one applicant we hired who needed to have her work schedule shortened so she could maintain her Child Care subsidy. Her department manager willingly made this accommodation so this employee could keep her job as well as the subsidy. This is an example of employers being willing to assist partners in the community and retain a qualified employee.

Other challenges to finding employment may be the acquisition of the "soft skills" such as interviewing techniques, resume preparation, and appropriate dress for interviews. Generally speaking, Promise Jobs sends applicants who are well-prepared.

Should someone arrive who is not appropriate in either dress or resume, partnerships with employers allow for feedback.

I work with counselors so that the next time this individual interviews, he or she will approach the interview more professionally. In terms of retention of employees, I have found that those who are prepared well regarding attendance policies and employer expectations are more likely to succeed in their jobs.

At Mercy, we have a six month probationary period. Employees who stay beyond this period are much more likely to become long-term employees. Promise Jobs is helpful and provides follow-up for newly placed employees. This allows employees to address concerns or problems that might come up during the probationary period. These follow-up activities assist both the employer and the new employee increase the probability of success.

Mercy has hired people whose work history has been spotty to begin employment as Contingent employees. This gives an individual an opportunity to demonstrate reliability and dependability on the job. Individuals can then post for either full or part-time jobs.

I remember one young woman who applied for a position in Food Service. She began as Contingent (PRN) and then posted for full-time. This is a win-win as the department gets to observe what the person is able to do and the employee can demonstrate consistency and reliability. Job counselors who are open to such arrangements encourage applicants to look at alternative ways to enter the work force. This has proven to be a successful strategy when working with individuals looking to move toward meaningful full time employment.

My experience has been that the skills provided to Promise Job participants have enabled them to compete in the marketplace and increase their opportunities to succeed. I am pleased to be here to testify before the Committee and am happy to answer any questions you might have.