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Administrative Offices
6111 E. Skelly Dr.
Tulsa, OK 74135

Broken Arrow Campus
4600 S. Olive Ave.
Broken Arrow, OK 74011

- Memorial Complex**
- *Career Services Center*
3420 S. Memorial Dr.
Tulsa, OK 74145
 - *Health Sciences Center*
3350 S. Memorial Dr.
Tulsa, OK 74145
 - *Lemley Campus*
3420 S. Memorial Dr.
Tulsa, OK 74145
 - *Training Center*
3638 S. Memorial Dr.
Tulsa, OK 74145

Peoria Campus
3850 N. Peoria Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74106

Riverside Campus
801 E. 91st St.
Tulsa, OK 74132

Sand Springs Campus
500 N. Adams Rd.
Sand Springs, OK 74063

TESTIMONY OF MICHELLE JACKSON,
COORDINATOR, PROJECT HIRE
**At the Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support
U.S. House of Representatives
April 22, 2010**

Good morning, Chairman McDermott, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Michelle Jackson, and I am the Coordinator of Project HIRE at Tulsa Technology Center located in Tulsa, Oklahoma. HIRE stands for Helping Individuals Reach Employment and is one of 19 funded programs, in 19 Technology Centers, which have multiple campuses across Oklahoma.—Since 1996, these programs have been funded through a contract between the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Centers. Although I am representing the Technology Centers today, I wanted committee members to know that Oklahoma Department of Human Services has entered into a similar contract with the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education. Fifteen community colleges operate TANF programs at multiple campuses across Oklahoma. It is my understanding that others will be providing testimony today in regard to the community college system and I have been chosen to explain the programs operating in the technology center system.

TANF Programs are designed for TANF recipients seeking educational training and employment services leading to careers that provide self-sufficient wages. This program provides career guidance, academic remediation related to their technical training, employment skills work based education (i.e., clinical, on the job training, internships), job placement, and job retention support.

I have been asked to present some of the successes and challenges frontline program staff members face in serving low income families receiving TANF benefits. Students encounter many challenges, such as reliable daycare, transportation, housing, poor work history, and low levels of education attainment, while pursuing their educational goals. Although students face these various challenges, with the supportive services offered by the program, they do reach employment success. For example, Hal Lofton completed the Network Systems Administration program and received a full-time position with Tulsa Tech's Information Technology Department with a starting salary of \$32,160.00 plus benefits. Amanda Catalano completed the Office Management Technology and Legal Office and Project Management program and has been offered a \$30,000 a year position with a Tulsa law firm.

Every year since the early 90's, The Oklahoma Career and Technical Education Equity Council (OKCTEEC), an affiliate of the Administration Division of the Oklahoma Association of Career and Technical Education, has sponsored the Make It Work Day Awards Ceremony at the State Capitol. HIRE has had the opportunity to nominate several students for awards such as Outstanding Student and Non-Traditional Student. Community and Business/Industry Partners who collaborate with the HIRE program may also be nominated. During the past four years that I have served as coordinator, four of our students have won awards for the Northeast Region.

2007 Jessica Derossett won the Breaking Traditions Non-Traditional Student Achievement Award for completing the Machining Program specially designed for TANF students. Jessica was employed with Baker Oil Tools for two years before taking a position at Southwest United Industries, where she is still employed. She also won the National CTEEC Breaking Traditions Award in 2008.

2008 Lacie Peacock won the Outstanding Student Award. She completed both the Legal Office/Project Management Program and the Office Technology Program, and has been employed with Tulsa Tech since completing school. Lacie is an Office Support Specialist I, with a starting annual salary of \$22,164.

2009 Dan Arnold won the Outstanding Student Award. Dan completed the Computer Technology Program. His first day on the job was also his graduation day. He completed his first day of employment with Patterson Dental and then came to his graduation ceremonies that evening. Dan's starting salary was \$16 an hour with full medical and dental benefits and a company car.

2010 Jina Wallace won the Outstanding Student Award. She completed the Medical Assistant Program and accepted a full-time job offer with Family Medical Center, where she had completed her internship.

While we have experienced some awesome successes, there have been challenges. In the past three years as Coordinator, one of the greatest challenges for me has been the one year limitation on vocational training. There are some technology programs that are potentially unavailable to TANF recipients because of the number of months and/or years needed to complete the program.

The following are some programs that exceed the one year limitation:

- Licensed Practical Nursing (Practical Nursing), starting salary of \$12.96-20.00/hour
- Radiologic Technology, starting salary of \$18.48-24.78/hour
- Aviation Maintenance Technology-General, starting salary of \$10-15.00/hour
- Aviation Maintenance Technology-Airframe, starting salary of \$11.92-27.48/hour
- Aviation Maintenance Technology-Powerplant, starting salary of \$11.92-27.48/hour
- Machining Technology, offers Craftmanship* program, starting salary of \$10.36-19.01/hour
- Automation & Robotics Technology, offers Craftmanship* program, starting salary of \$10.25-18.51/hour

*Craftsmanship is an apprenticeship program within the manufacturing occupations.

As policy currently stands, the student can complete the second year, but not without experiencing enormous barriers. Not only is the student required to be in class full-time (7:55-2:40), TANF rules require a 20-hr work activity outside of school to keep the TANF case open. This amounts to a 50-hour work week that does not take into consideration the obligations of raising one or more children and the requirements that low-income families face each week to keep their benefits active.

The work activities are burdensome not only to the student and family, but also to the school. During the holidays i.e. Christmas Break and Spring Break, when tech center campuses are closed, special accommodations must be made in order for the TANF programs to meet and fulfill the work activity requirements. Some of those accommodations are as follows:

- Additional cost to keep building open (security, heating & air, administration supervision)

- Potential overtime for a non-scheduled full-time employee
- Designing appropriate educational/job search activities

The last accommodation is extremely challenging because there are no full-time instructors available to assist with training and because of current TANF rules, life skill classes are not an allowable work activity. Also, students have to make accommodations for any school-aged children who are not eligible for day care benefits through the Department of Human Services.

Another barrier that many front-line staff encounter is the deficiency of life skills exhibited in clients. Currently, life skill classes are not an approved work activity. This hinders students from learning the work ethic necessary to retain employment and balance work with home responsibilities. Fundamental life skills are necessary and have a direct impact on a student's success, both during the educational process, job readiness, and initial employment.

I recognize that everyone should not or cannot enroll in the 18 month to 3 year programs at the Tech Centers. But if the goal is to assist TANF clients to become self-sufficient, then by not allowing them the opportunity to take some of the longer programs (which could potentially provided a more sustainable wage) many times sets the client up to reapply for TANF benefits.

There are a few options I would like to present to the committee this morning.

- Remove the one-year vocational education limitation to allow clients to take some of the longer programs. Also allow states to be flexible in providing a combination of services that will help TANF clients obtain and retain better jobs with higher wages. Many technology students are dually enrolled with community colleges throughout Oklahoma through a college alliance program.

Upon completion of the tech center program, these students can complete their education at the college to earn an associate degree. A 2009 report from the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated a substantial increase in wage earnings for those with some college or an associate degree (\$722 weekly) versus those with less than a high school diploma (\$453 weekly) and those with high school diploma, no college (\$618 weekly).

- Lift the TANF 60 month time limit during times of economic hardship such as the one our nation is experiencing right now. There is the risk that some families, who have reached their 60 months may be faced with homelessness and poverty without any means of recovery. This extension option could potentially position those experiencing economic hardship to obtain skills for better jobs and better pay.
- Eliminate the 30% cap of those families on TANF who can participate in vocational education. Removing this cap will allow states to count all families, participating in vocational training, towards Federal work participation rates. The goal is to assist needy families. How can we serve families if we are only allowed to serve 30% of the population? What happens to the other 70% of the population who are still eligible to receive educational benefits under the TANF guidelines? By allowing the 30% cap to remain, there is the potential for recidivism and without the proper tools and skills one needs to retain employment - this can dramatically increase the unemployment rates.

I realize as a frontline advocate that not everyone wants an opportunity to pursue education beyond the one year of vocational training, but I would like to be in a position to assist a student who does, without some of the current legislative barriers. And I also realize that if the 60 months is extended, there may be some who try to take advantage of this opportunity. But, there are more of those who could benefit from knowing that they don't have to feel hopeless or be homeless.

I know legislators now must make decisions based on performance and I can assure you that the Oklahoma TANF program provides a significant return on investment. For Fiscal year 2009, programs met the state-wide minimum related to training placement rate of 75% and the 80% minimum standard of completion. Actual percentages for Fiscal year 2009 were 80.44%, and the retention rate was 74.09%. To date, the program has served 1,618 TANF recipients and we have 3 more months in our fiscal year. We project the program will serve over 2,000 by the end of the fiscal year. This year the Project HIRE program has served 151 TANF clients to date. This is approximately a 10% increase from last year and we still have 3 months left in the fiscal year.

Consideration of these options could position those of us who are the frontline program staff members with the tools and resources to assist the clients we serve without adding barriers to their educational goals, thus positioning them for positive employment and family sufficiency.

Thank you for your consideration.