

**FIELD HEARING ON THE DIGNITY OF WORK:
LIFTING INDIVIDUALS OUT OF POVERTY**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORK AND WELFARE
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

APRIL 9, 2024

Serial No. 118–WW07

Printed for the use of the Committee on Ways and Means



U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

56–477

WASHINGTON : 2024

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

JASON SMITH, Missouri, *Chairman*

VERN BUCHANAN, Florida	RICHARD E. NEAL, Massachusetts
ADRIAN SMITH, Nebraska	LLOYD DOGGETT, Texas
MIKE KELLY, Pennsylvania	MIKE THOMPSON, California
DAVID SCHWEIKERT, Arizona	JOHN B. LARSON, Connecticut
DARIN LAHOOD, Illinois	EARL BLUMENAUER, Oregon
BRAD WENSTRUP, Ohio	BILL PASCRELL, Jr., New Jersey
JODEY ARRINGTON, Texas	DANNY DAVIS, Illinois
DREW FERGUSON, Georgia	LINDA SANCHEZ, California
RON ESTES, Kansas	TERRI SEWELL, Alabama
LLOYD SMUCKER, Pennsylvania	SUZAN DELBENE, Washington
KEVIN HERN, Oklahoma	JUDY CHU, California
CAROL MILLER, West Virginia	GWEN MOORE, Wisconsin
GREG MURPHY, North Carolina	DAN KILDEE, Michigan
DAVID KUSTOFF, Tennessee	DON BEYER, Virginia
BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania	DWIGHT EVANS, Pennsylvania
GREG STEUBE, Florida	BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois
CLAUDIA TENNEY, New York	JIMMY PANETTA, California
MICHELLE FISCHBACH, Minnesota	JIMMY GOMEZ, California
BLAKE MOORE, Utah	
MICHELLE STEEL, California	
BETH VAN DUYN, Texas	
RANDY FEENSTRA, Iowa	
NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS, New York	
MIKE CAREY, Ohio	

MARK ROMAN, *Staff Director*

BRANDON CASEY, *Minority Chief Counsel*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORK AND WELFARE

DARIN LAHOOD, Illinois, *Chairman*

BRAD WENSTRUP, Ohio	DANNY DAVIS, Illinois
MIKE CAREY, Ohio	JUDY CHU, California
BLAKE MOORE, Utah	GWEN MOORE, Wisconsin
MICHELLE STEEL, California	DWIGHT EVANS, Pennsylvania
LLOYD SMUCKER, Pennsylvania	TERRI SEWELL, Alabama
ADRIAN SMITH, Nebraska	
CLAUDIA TENNEY, New York	

C O N T E N T S

OPENING STATEMENTS

	Page
Hon. Darin LAHOOD, Illinois, Chairman	1
Hon. Danny Davis, Illinois, Ranking Member	3
Advisory of April 9, 2024 announcing the hearing	V

WITNESSES

Matt Paprocki, President and CEO, Illinois Policy Institute	6
Nathan Montgomery, Executive Director, Salt & Light	13
Brian Butler, Director of Residential Ministries, Pathway Ministries	22
Kristy Schofield, Director of Homelessness & Housing, Dream Center Peoria ..	29
Gianno Caldwell, Founder, Caldwell Strategic Consulting	33
Sodiqa Williams, Senior Vice President, Safer Foundation	39

LOCAL SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Local Submissions	67
-------------------------	----

PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Public Submissions	81
--------------------------	----



United States House Committee on
Ways & Means
CHAIRMAN JASON SMITH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 2, 2024
No. WW-07

CONTACT: 202-225-3625

**Chairman Smith and Work & Welfare Subcommittee Chairman LaHood
Announce Subcommittee Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting
Individuals Out of Poverty**

House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Jason Smith (MO-08) and Work & Welfare Subcommittee Chairman Darin LaHood (IL-16) announced today that the Subcommittee on Work & Welfare will hold a hearing on how work lifts individuals out of poverty. The hearing will take place at **9:00 AM (Central Standard Time) on Tuesday, April 9, 2024, at Pacific Garden Mission** in Chicago, Illinois.

Members of the public may view the hearing via live webcast available at <https://waysandmeans.house.gov>. The webcast will not be available until the hearing starts.

In view of the limited time available to hear the witnesses, oral testimony at this hearing will be from invited witnesses only. However, any individual or organization not scheduled for an oral appearance may submit a written statement for consideration by the Committee and for inclusion in the printed record of the hearing.

DETAILS FOR SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS:

Please Note: Any person(s) and/or organization(s) wishing to submit written comments for the hearing record can do so here: WMSubmission@mail.house.gov.

Please ATTACH your submission as a Microsoft Word document in compliance with the formatting requirements listed below, **by the close of business on Tuesday, April 23, 2024**. For questions, or if you encounter technical problems, please call (202) 225-3625.

FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS:

The Committee relies on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record. As always, submissions will be included in the record according to the discretion of the Committee. The Committee will not alter the content of your submission but reserves the right to format it according to guidelines. Any submission provided to the Committee by a witness, any materials submitted for the printed record, and any written comments in response to a request for written comments must conform to the guidelines listed below. Any submission not in compliance with these guidelines will not be printed but will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

All submissions and supplementary materials must be submitted in a single document via email, provided in Word format and must not exceed a total of 10 pages. Please indicate the title of the hearing as the subject line in your submission. Witnesses and submitters are advised that the Committee relies on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record. All submissions must include a list of all clients, persons and/or organizations on whose behalf the witness appears. The name, company, address, telephone, and fax numbers of each witness must be included in the body of the email. Please exclude any personal identifiable information in the attached submission.

Failure to follow the formatting requirements may result in the exclusion of a submission. All submissions for the record are final.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

The Committee seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you require accommodations, please call 202-225-3625 or request via email to WMSubmission@mail.house.gov in advance of the event (four business days' notice is requested). Questions regarding accommodation needs in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats) may be directed to the Committee as noted above.

Note: All Committee advisories and news releases are available on the Committee website at <http://www.waysandmeans.house.gov/>.

###

THE DIGNITY OF WORK: LIFTING INDIVIDUALS OUT OF POVERTY

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORK AND WELFARE,
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 9:01 a.m. at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, Illinois, Hon. Darin LaHood [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Chairman LAHOOD. The subcommittee will come to order, and I am Congressman Darin LaHood, the chair of the Work and Welfare Subcommittee. And I want to welcome everybody to this Work and Welfare Subcommittee hearing today in the city of Chicago. And we are so proud to have the members of the Ways and Means Committee here today for this important hearing.

Before we begin, let me just acknowledge Pastor Phil and the folks here at Pacific Garden Mission for the work they have done to make this hearing come about. Let's give them a round of applause. [Applause.]

Chairman LAHOOD. A lot of work went into putting this together, and so we are thrilled to have a wonderful venue to have our hearing today. And it is not often that we get 10 Members of Congress outside of Washington, D.C. to come out to Chicago, but today's field hearing is reflective of that, in a bipartisan way, to have members of the Ways and Means Committee here, and specifically the Work and Welfare Subcommittee.

I also want to acknowledge Congressman Danny Davis. We are in his district here. Yes—

[Applause.]

Chairman LAHOOD [continuing]. And for him to welcome us here. I am proud to represent the 16th district of Illinois, which is a little south and west of here. My home is Peoria. I also represent Bloomington-Normal and the city of Rockford, and then I extend out into DeKalb County, McHenry County, and Grundy County. And so it is an honor and a privilege to represent the constituents of the 16th district and to be here today for this important hearing.

So we, Congressman Davis and I, work on the Work and Welfare Subcommittee, which has responsibility of overseeing several important Federal anti-poverty programs that provide assistance to vulnerable children and families. And we are very lucky, obviously, to be here today at Pacific Garden Mission, and to see the work here to uplift and restore the lives of homeless individuals and families here in Chicago.

Yesterday we had the opportunity to visit Project HOOD and Pastor Corey Brooks. We did a field—a site hearing, or a site visit yesterday at in Englewood, and we learned about the important work that Pastor Brooks and his team are doing to uplift and transform lives in Englewood and Woodlawn, including building a new community center there.

One of the things that has stood out to me about both of these organizations is their philosophy of uplifting and equipping individuals in crisis with skills and tools to find stability and transform their lives through faith and work.

How we define “help” matters. Whether it is through churches, non-profits, private foundations, or government programs, when providing relief and assistance to those in need we should be exploring every possibility to promote work as a—as the surest pathway out of poverty. No amount of handouts or government assistance, no matter how well intentioned, can substitute for the intangible benefits and dignity that work brings to individuals and their families, and the ripple effect it has on our communities.

All of our government programs need to be oriented to provide every opportunity for individuals to grow their capacity and be connected to meaningful work. At the most fundamental level, work provides income and greatly reduces the likelihood of being in poverty. Simply working even part-time dramatically reduces the chances of living below the poverty line.

In 2021 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that only 4.1 of individuals who worked part-time over a period of at least 27 weeks had incomes below the poverty line, and only 2.6 of those who worked full-time.

Beyond providing a reliable source of income, work also provides countless intangible benefits to individuals. Research has shown that work is associated with improved physical and mental health, social well-being, and higher degrees of human connectedness and social capital. Conversely, studies have linked joblessness with increased social isolation, depression, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness. Joblessness can even affect physical health. One study found that unemployment lasting longer than six months can reduce life expectancy by as much as a year-and-a-half for a 40-year-old worker.

Tying Federal benefits to the expectation of work is not punishment. Work in exchange for benefits represents society’s commitment to helping individuals and families in crisis. In fact, most Americans support work as a condition of welfare. A 2023 Axios poll found nearly two-thirds of Americans, including half of Democrats, support work requirements for welfare programs.

As part of this committee’s ongoing efforts to restore work requirements to Federal programs in 2023, we secured a major victory by strengthening work requirements for families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, known as TANF, cash assistance as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. The bipartisan law closed loopholes to hold states accountable for engaging TANF work-eligible individuals in work, and established pilot programs to measure recipient employment and earnings outcomes to test alternative measures of performance.

But more can be done. Conducting these field hearings, like we are doing today, gives us an opportunity to hear directly from people who have overcome the odds to escape poverty, and the organization and leaders that do the hard work every day to help individuals transform their lives. And we will hear from some of those remarkable individuals today as our witnesses.

I want to again thank our witnesses for being here today, and for the Pacific Garden Mission, and I look forward to the testimony we will hear.

Chairman LAHOOD. With that I am pleased now to recognize Mr. Davis, our ranking member, for his opening statement.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank you for holding this field hearing. I am delighted to welcome all of you to my home city of Chicago. There was a time when we would say it has Wrigley Field, Soldier Field, Marshall Field, and it sits by a lake of some size. But I am pleased to be here with all of you at the Pacific Garden Mission, and to have visited Project HOOD yesterday. Both organizations serve people in need so well.

Democrats and President Biden have put helping workers overcome barriers to sustainable, quality employment at the heart of our policies. Even in this time of economic growth, where wages have risen and unemployment has been cut in half, too many people are left out not because they prefer needing government help, but because they face significant barriers to quality employment. Some don't have childcare or need paid leave to deal with an illness or care for an elderly parent. Some lack the skills or education needed for good jobs. Some have jobs, but don't earn enough to make ends meet, like the 6.4 million working poor. Some made mistakes in the past and can't get a second chance.

I am proud that Democrats provided emergency aid to preserve childcare centers and permanently increased Federal child care investment by over 600 million a year, about 20 million of it right here in Illinois.

I am proud that Democrats expanded the child tax credit that slashed child poverty to just 5.2 percent in Illinois. Unfortunately, that poverty cut in child tax credit expired due to Republican inaction, and child poverty is back up to 12.4 percent, an unacceptable outcome.

If our goal is to support work to help people escape poverty, then people don't need more penalties, requirements, and paperwork. Parents need guaranteed childcare and paid family and medical leave that we know substantially increase workforce participation among women. People need a safe place to live, food to eat, reliable transportation, good education, and health care to sustain the stability needed to work successfully.

I strongly disagree with those that blame people for their poverty and suggest that the solution is low or no-wage jobs with work requirements to make sure they don't develop a dependency mentality. Denying people food, housing, enough money to pay the rent, and making them work for free doesn't give them dignity.

I am proud to showcase the work done at the Safer Foundation to overcome the systemic barriers faced by justice-involved individuals so they can get good jobs and turn their lives around. I worked with Safer to set up an amazing program to help people with

records obtain careers in health care. The program involves intensive training coupled with legal services, support services, technical assistance for businesses, and job placement services. Over three years the initiative placed 113 clients with 71 employers and achieved a 93 percent retention rate over 2 years. Our subcommittee should support programs like Safer that methodically address the multiple barriers struggling workers face.

As we sit in the Mission I am reminded of 2017, when the Republican Congress enacted a bill to tax faith-based organizations on the value of their parking and benefits provided to employees to pay for tax cuts for wealthy individuals and corporations. I heard a lot from faith-based organizations in Illinois about the church parking tax. Democrats repealed this tax in 2019, but the wealthy who benefitted from those tax breaks will soon ask Congress to extend their tax cuts. My hope is that my Republican colleagues will protect the programs that help people live with dignity, and not make them subsidize tax cuts for the wealthy again.

As a Black American who grew up in the segregated South and who came to Chicago for the opportunities that were not as available in the South, I know firsthand how systemic barriers limit opportunities. It has been my honor to devote my congressional career to work, like we do in this subcommittee, to help those who are struggling to overcome systemic barriers with the education, jobs, child care, paid family and medical leave, and other supports so that they can thrive.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about our work and thank you very much.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Davis. It is now——
[Applause.]

Chairman LAHOOD. It is now my pleasure to introduce the chairman of the full Ways and Means Committee, Mr. Smith of Missouri.

And when Mr. Smith took over as our leader on the committee, he talked about doing a number of field hearings. And I think this is our ninth or tenth field hearing that we have done over the last year-and-a-half, getting out across America to hear from individuals on what we can do better in Washington, D.C. And so it wasn't just rhetoric; it is the reality that we are doing these field hearings.

And so, with that, it is my pleasure to introduce our chairman, Mr. Smith of Missouri.

Chairman SMITH. Thank you, Chairman LaHood and Ranking Member Davis.

It is not often that a subcommittee is led by the chair and the ranking member from the same state, and so I am glad we could visit Illinois to hear from folks that you both represent. So thanks for the hospitality of hosting us, Ranking Member Davis.

I also want to thank Pastor Phil. Thank you all so much, and your entire team here at Pacific Garden Mission for hosting our committee.

Today we are——
[Applause.]

Chairman SMITH. Today we are actually making history. This is the first time in congressional history that a standing House

committee has held a hearing in a homeless shelter. Way overdue. [Applause.]

Chairman SMITH. Pacific Garden Mission is the oldest faith-based homeless shelter in the country, providing help to men and women across Chicago since 1877. The work you do is critically important to helping those in need transform their lives. Most importantly, what you do here is about not giving up on people. That is why we are having the hearing today. We are in Chicago to listen to the real stories of individuals whose lives were transformed by work, and what it takes to shepherd those in crisis from poverty to independence.

Taxpayers fund a fragmented and often confusing safety net system that spans more than 80 different Federal programs at a cost of more than \$1 trillion every year. These programs provide important food, housing, health care, and cash assistance to help those in poverty. However, as Federal support has grown, programs have largely failed to focus on how to help lift people back into full self-sufficiency. Instead, success is measured by how many new people are added to the rolls of these programs.

This approach discourages people from seeking a path to work. As a result, more people are receiving welfare benefits today than at any time in our nation's history. In 2023, 85 million people were enrolled in Medicaid, an increase of 20 percent since 2019. This represents 25 percent of the U.S. population. One-fourth of the U.S. population is on Medicaid. In 2023, 41 million people received food assistance through SNAP, an increase of 18 percent since 2019. This represents 12 percent of the entire population.

What we have lost sight of is that a job is the best anti-poverty program that exists. Work is more than a paycheck. Every person has skills and abilities they can offer to their community. Often it is just connecting those skills with the right job. When people are not able to apply their talents, they miss out on the dignity that comes from work, and their communities are denied their contributions.

Relying on a government check can weaken an individual's ability to use and grow their skills. Instead of climbing out of poverty, families find themselves without hope and trapped with fewer options for their future. Children with parents who are unable to find meaningful employment often struggle in school, and they face more severe mental health issues, contributing to a generational cycle of poverty. In fact, one in every three children who grow up in poverty will raise their own children in poverty.

We must break the cycle. Clearly, the path from welfare to work is not easy or straightforward. Folks often must first overcome the barriers that contribute to poverty, like mental health or educational challenges, substance abuse, health problems, neglect. Too often, however, community leaders find themselves battling against so-called solutions from Washington that make it harder for individuals to escape poverty.

We know as much from recent history. Under the American Rescue Plan Act, the child tax credit was transformed from a program that rewards work to one that does not, and Democrats extended unemployment benefits that paid people more not to work. As a consequence, a government check was worth more than a paycheck,

and millions of families sat on the sidelines. It is not the fault of those families; they were just responding to the incentives of Washington, which they provided.

There is more that we can and we should do. Last year, as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, Republicans led changes to strengthen work requirements and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and supplemental nutrition assistance programs. Last month Republican members on our committee introduced legislation that would protect taxpayer dollars provided through TANF from being lost to waste, fraud, and abuse.

We are here because we want to hear from those on the front lines of this crisis. There will be clipboards that our team—will be passed out for anyone in the audience to share any concerns or ideas. We will enter those into the official record and take them back with us to Washington as we consider how policies can better connect people to work and lift more Americans out of poverty.

Thank you all for joining us today. We look forward to your testimony.

Chairman SMITH. And thank you, Chairman LaHood.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Chairman Smith, for that.

It is now my pleasure to introduce our witnesses here today. We have six of them, and we will start off with Mr. Matt Paprocki, who is the president and CEO of the Illinois Policy Institute. He is also the CEO of the Center for Poverty Solutions, and a real thought leader here in Chicago.

Next we will hear from Nathan Montgomery, who is the executive director of Salt and Light in Urbana, Illinois.

Our next witness will be Brian Butler, who is from my hometown of Peoria, Illinois, and is the director of residential ministries at Pathway in Peoria.

And then next we will hear from Kristy Schofield, also from Peoria, and is the director of homelessness and housing at the Dream Center in Peoria, Illinois.

Next we will hear from Gianni Caldwell, who is the founder of Caldwell Strategic Consulting in Washington, D.C., but a native of Chicago, and proud of his Chicago heritage.

And lastly we will hear from Sodiqa Williams, who is the vice—senior vice president of the Safer Foundation here in Chicago.

You will all be recognized for five minutes.

And we will begin with you, Mr. Paprocki.

**STATEMENT OF MATT PAPROCKI, PRESIDENT AND CEO,
ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE**

Mr. PAPROCKI. Thank you, Chairman Smith, Chairman LaHood, and Ranking Member Davis, and the distinguished members of this committee. My name is Matt Paprocki. I am the founder of the Center for Poverty Solutions, a project created from the Illinois Policy Institute, where I serve as president and CEO. Today in my testimony I want to demonstrate why work is the best pathway out of poverty and to give people dignity. And I want to end by giving three solutions that this committee can do to enact that.

But first, let me give you some background. The Center for Poverty Solutions was created to look at the research behind what are

the biggest drivers to eradicate poverty. And we work with direct service agencies, partner together, and we pass bipartisan legislation to reduce poverty and increase opportunities. Our goal is to eliminate poverty starting here, in the City of Chicago.

And I have good news. We have one single factor that can reduce poverty by 87 percent. It is work. In fact, those people who are working a full-time job, only 2 percent of them are currently in poverty.

Take, for example, my friend Steven Blake. Steven was a homeless veteran, but thanks to this place here, Pacific Garden Mission, he was given shelter and job training. Today Steven is an entrepreneur who sells fresh fruits to commuters on their way to work. Two months ago I walked by Steven on this cold, freezing day. It is raining outside, and I saw Steven there. I said, "Steven, what are you doing out here today?"

And Steven points to a man a few feet away from us, and he is holding a sign, and the cardboard sign says, please help. And he said, "Matt, that used to be me." He said, "I stood out here every single day, and every person who walked by, I would ask them, How can you help me?" He said, "Today I do the opposite. Every single person who walks by I say, How can I help you?" A huge smile comes across his face. He said, "Matt, I got to be out here. People need me." That is dignity. That is a dignity that is enshrined in our Constitution in the phrase "in the pursuit of happiness." That is a dignity that lifts people closer to the image and the likeness of God. That is a dignity that lifts people out of mental illness, out of abuse, and out of dependency.

Quite frankly, this is what is missing in our society today, a society which often tells people you can't do it. Because poverty today is less about food and housing and security, and it is becoming more about hopelessness, independence. Meaningful work can solve all of these problems. I know because I have lived it.

When I was 24 years old I was a professional staffer, and I got a call from my mom. She said, "Matt, I am at the hospital, and I have just been diagnosed with cancer." So I left the job that I loved because my mom needed me. And for the next eight months I stayed at home with her. And one cold December day she died in my arms and I lost my purpose. I had no job. I had no money. I had no parents. Nobody needed me. For the next few months I qualified for just about every welfare benefit there was, and I thank God that I never took them. Because for too many Americans, welfare is not a temporary safety net; it is a snare net. And generations get stuck inside of this. In fact, a Pew study shows that 70 percent of people who are currently on government assistance will never escape, and that extends to their children and their grandchildren.

My escape from poverty was the same as Steven's and millions of others. We found a job. More importantly, we found dignity in work. And from there we built our families, we became more active in our community. We volunteered. We can help millions of Americans, lift them up out of poverty, and bring them closer to that dignity of work. And this committee here can do three things to help drive that home.

The first is stop the benefits cliff. Right now we have created this impossible structure, where families are forced with the decision of either cut back on their hours or don't take a promotion or receive additional government funding. We are stopping that, and we need to change the benefits cliff.

The second is expand tax credits for apprenticeships. The average apprenticeship starting salary is \$77,000 a year.

And finally, institute work requirements similar to the successful bipartisan reform that was passed in 1996 which lifted millions of people out of poverty.

Today I ask all of you to create a better America, an America which tells all people, "We need you," an America that creates limitless opportunities, an America that allows all people to pursue happiness. And that pursuit begins with the dignity of work.

Thank you, Chairman LaHood. Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Davis, and all the members of this committee for the opportunity to testify today.

[The statement of Mr. Paprocki follows:]



Statement before the House on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Welfare and Work
The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty

Eradicating Poverty through the Dignity of Work

Matthew Paprocki
President and CEO of the Center for Poverty Solutions
The Illinois Policy Institute

April 9, 2024

The Illinois Policy Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization and does not take institutional positions on issues. The views are expressed in this testimony are those of the author.

Thank you, Chairmen Smith and LaHood and Ranking Member Davis. Thank you to the distinguished members of this committee.

My name is Matt Paprocki. I am the founder of the Center for Poverty Solutions, a project of the Illinois Policy Institute where I serve as president and CEO.

In my testimony today, I'll explain why work is the best way to eradicate poverty and restore people's dignity. I'll close by offering three solutions to get us there.

First, let me give you an overview.

The Center for Poverty Solutions has taken a data-driven approach to understanding the main creators of poverty. We work with direct service agencies, partnering to pass bipartisan solutions to reduce poverty by creating opportunity.

Our goal is to eliminate poverty, starting in Chicago.

The good news is we've found a way to do it. One single factor can reduce poverty by over 87% – work.

Poverty rates among people with a full-time job is just 2%.

Take for example my friend, Steven Blake.

Steven was a homeless veteran. But thanks to the help of this place, the Pacific Garden Mission, he was given housing and job training. Today, Steven is an entrepreneur selling fresh fruit in downtown Chicago.

One day I saw Steven selling fruit in freezing-cold rain. I said, "Why are you out here today?" Steven pointed to a man holding a sign reading, "Please help." He said, "That used to be me. I asked everyone that walked by me how they can help me. Today I ask the opposite. I ask everyone that walks by how I can help them."

This is the same question I have heard members of congress ask at the end of every meeting, "How can I help you?"

I looked back at Steven and a huge smile crossed his face: "I've got to be out here. People need me."

That's dignity.

A dignity that's enshrined in our constitution, in the phrase "the pursuit of happiness."

A dignity that pulls people closer to the image and likeness of God.

A dignity that lifts people out of addiction, dependency and mental illness.

It's what's missing from our system, which too often tells people they can't. We need to shift that mindset. Today's poverty isn't just about food and housing insecurity – it's a problem of hopelessness and despair.

Meaningful work can solve all of these problems.

I know. Because I've lived it.

When I was 24, I worked as a professional staffer, similar to the fantastic staff you have here at Ways and Means. Like them, I loved that job. But I got a call one day from my mom. She said, "Matt, I'm at the doctor, and they just diagnosed me with cancer." After that call, I left the job because my mom needed me. For the next eight months, I had the honor of taking care of her. One cold December day, she died in my arms. I lost my purpose. I had no job. No money. No parents. Nobody needed me.

In the following months, I qualified for most welfare benefits. I thank God I never took them, because welfare is rarely a temporary safety net. It's a snare.

Today we have a record number of people trapped in the complex web of welfare – SNAP, TANF, EITC, public housing.

Those in the snare are often stuck for generations. A Pew study found 70% will never escape government dependency, and it extends to their children and grandchildren.

My escape from poverty was the same as Steven's and millions of others – we found jobs.

More precisely, we found dignity through work.

We built families, became active in our communities, volunteered.

We can help millions of Americans also rise up by changing policies. Here are three solutions this committee can enact:

- 1) End the benefits cliff. Our archaic benefits systems leaves people with impossible choices: provide for their family at a job or reduce work activities and receive greater benefits from government assistance.
- 2) Expand tax credits for apprenticeships. The average income of someone after an apprenticeship is \$77,000.
- 3) And institute work requirements with welfare benefits, similar to the successful bipartisan reforms we saw in 1996, which increased work and decreased dependence.

I ask you today to help us create a better America.

An America that lifts people up.

An America that creates opportunity.

An America that helps people pursue happiness.

That pursuit starts with the dignity of work.

Thank you, Chairmen Smith and LaHood, Ranking Member Davis and members of the committee for this opportunity.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Paprocki. We will next recognize Mr. Montgomery.

**STATEMENT OF NATHAN MONTGOMERY, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, SALT AND LIGHT**

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Good morning, Chairman Smith, Subcommittee Chairman LaHood, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on the dignity of work.

I am the co-founder and executive director of Salt and Light, located in Champaign, Urbana, Illinois. The Salt and Light opened its doors in January 2004, with a focus on sharing the good news of the gospel by helping those in need through a food pantry and clothing closet. Very quickly, we grew into the largest emergency food program in our area and a leader for providing access to basic resources.

As Salt and Light's reach and influence expanded, I grew disillusioned with what we were doing. Most of the situations I encountered never seemed to change, and the lines only got longer. I had even begun seeing young adults standing in line who, as children, stood in line with their parents. The generational cycle of poverty was playing out right before my eyes. I began asking myself, were we contributing to it?

It was at this time I was introduced to the book, "When Helping Hurts," our small staff and board began a journey of wrestling with what it had to say and what it might mean for us to embrace its ideologies. As 2013 ended, I presented the board with a vision for what change might look like.

As we moved forward we acknowledged how much we still didn't know, and how important it was to be willing to listen and learn along the way. The primary guiding principle during this time was we knew we had to stop doing for and start doing with. We recognized that by doing for individuals what they could or had the potential to do for themselves, we caused harm.

The result is a unique and innovative approach for addressing chronic food insecurity and access to other basic resources, where individuals can acquire what their family needs, learn practical job skills, and generate revenue to fund the programming at the same time. In our model participants earn store credit at minimum wage by volunteering at either of our locations for up to a maximum of four hours each week. This credit can be used to purchase groceries, clothing, or other household items.

Both of our locations operate a retail storefront offering second-hand items, and our Urbana location has a grocery department comparable to an Aldi in the number and types of items that it carries. Inventory is purchased from a variety of vendors, just like any other independent grocery store. Both stores are open to the public and are staffed by regular, full and part-time employees and volunteers, with participants working alongside. Accepted forms of payment include cash, credit and debit cards, participant store credit. Urbana also accepts SNAP and WIC for qualifying grocery items. One hundred percent of the net proceeds from the stores support the store credit participants earn, and the other programs and services we offer.

The last year of the old model, we had a budget of just under \$370,000 that was 100 percent funded through donations. Transitioning to a retail storefront with all the programmatic changes meant an increase in staffing to 14 employees, and an almost 200 percent increase to the budget. But because of the revenues generated by the retail operations, we only needed to raise six percent more in donations than we had previously. This year our operating budget is 3.6 million, and is about 85 percent self-funded through our retail operations, with the remaining 15 percent coming from donations. We have 51 employees and 150 participant households who are earning store credit.

I do not believe simply ensuring work requirements are fulfilled and loopholes are closed for TANF will provide the kind of transformation desired. I do believe, however, not doing so is a disservice to the people we seek to help. Reasonable and appropriate expectations based on the capacity of the individual is not punitive or onerous. It is loving and affirming.

It has been said people rise or fall to the level of the expectations you have for them. To have no expectations is to communicate you do not believe they have anything to offer, anything to contribute, not only in their situation but to the community they are a part of. I can think of nothing more diminishing and disempowering to the very spirit, the very dignity of a person.

Regardless of the changes made to TANF, however, I have little faith any widespread transformation will occur in the lives of those struggling in poverty if the states are the administrators of this or any other welfare program. The one-size-fits-all approach most state and Federal programs take do not allow for the kind of flexibility needed to effectively work with families whose situations and obstacles vary from one neighbor to the next, let alone from one end of the state to the other. From the Federal perspective, I can understand where administration through the states may be more efficient, but clearly it has been programmatically ineffective.

It is time we stop doing what is easy and start doing what is right.

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Subcommittee Chairman LaHood, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify here today.

[The statement of Mr. Montgomery follows:]



Witness Statement of Nathan Montgomery
Co-Founder & Executive Director of Salt & Light

Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means,
Subcommittee on Work and Welfare

The Dignity of Work: How Work Lifts Individuals Out of Poverty

April 9, 2024

Chairman Smith, Subcommittee Chairman LaHood, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of my community and those I have worked with over the past 20 years. It is truly an honor.

I am the cofounder and Executive Director for Salt & Light, located in Champaign-Urbana, IL. Since we first opened our doors in January 2004, I have been on a journey of personal growth and understanding of the complexities of poverty and the best practices for working with individuals to navigate a pathway out.

Historical Context

The ministry of Salt & Light was founded with a focus on sharing the “good news” of the gospel by helping those in need and we believed meeting material needs through a food pantry and clothing closet was a fulfillment of the mandate God places on every believer to love their neighbor.

While our desire to share our faith was God-breathed, I believe we were blind to our complete lack of awareness and understanding of poverty-alleviation principles, ideologies, and best practices, not to mention the organizations and churches who were already working to alleviate poverty in our community. We honestly desired to help people both materially and to develop transformational relationships with God, but our perspectives were simply too limited to know what we didn’t know.

Very quickly Salt & Light became the largest “emergency food program” in Champaign County, and a leader in the community for providing access to basic resources. In addition to the weekly assistance provided through the food pantry and clothing closet, we partnered with area churches in large events designed to help families with school supplies in the fall, meals at Thanksgiving, and gifts at Christmas.

As Salt & Light’s reach and influence grew, I began to grow disillusioned with what we were doing. We were sharing our faith with people, but most of the situations I encountered never seemed to change. I was now even seeing young adults standing in our food pantry line who, as children, stood in line with their parents—the generational cycle of poverty was playing out right before my eyes. The question I began asking myself was, “Were we contributing to it?”

It was at this time I was introduced to the book *When Helping Hurts*. This book began equipping me with an ideological and theological framework, articulating what I had seen and felt. I brought this book to our small staff and board, and we began a journey of wrestling with what it said.



Throughout this process, there were three critical questions we asked ourselves:

1. **What do we mean when we say we 'help' those struggling in poverty?** Based on the outcomes we had witnessed, we would have had to describe the help we provided as something only mildly alleviating some of the symptoms of the poverty our clients experienced, rarely, if ever, impacting or addressing the root causes.
2. **Is this how we want to help?** The short answer to this was no. The longer answer was no, because we believe in the capacity of the individuals we work with. We believe every person is born with skills, gifts, and abilities given to them by God, and we simply want to create space and opportunity for people to use them for the benefit of themselves, their families, and the community they are a part of. We want them to flourish.
3. **What must change for us to be able to impact the root causes?** We recognized many in our community certainly needed help acquiring basic resources like food and clothing, but we knew the way we had been "helping" to meet this need was not and could not address the root causes. The question wasn't whether people needed help, the question was how we should help.

As 2013 ended, I presented the board with a vision for how we might apply the ideologies and theologies in our context. After much conversation, planning, and prayer, the board eventually gave approval in June 2014 to move forward with the changes. Throughout the process we recognized how much we still didn't know, and our need to be willing and able to listen and learn along the way. The primary guiding principle during this time was **we knew we had to stop doing for and start doing with**. If we wanted to create a fertile environment for developing healthy relationships and individual growth and development for everyone involved, we had to be co-laborers. We believed this could be accomplished through a retail environment where individuals could acquire the resources their family needed, learn practical job skills, and generate revenue to fund the programming at the same time.

October 6, 2014, marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. After being closed for one month, Salt & Light reopened with a new logo, new mission statement, and a new model—transitioning all our former programming from the one-way giving model into the first iteration of the one we currently operate today.



Programmatic Shift

Salt & Light employs a unique and innovative approach for addressing chronic food insecurity and access to other basic needs, which builds on the strengths of families and individuals. We do this by providing opportunities for people to acquire the resources they need through their own skills, gifts, and abilities.

In our model participants earn store credit at minimum wage by volunteering in either of our locations for up to a maximum of four hours each week (\$56/week as of 2024). There are no income guidelines, requested documentation, or other requirements for participation. To open an account, participants complete a participant application and attend an orientation.

Even though we can create space and opportunity to work for individuals of almost any capacity, there are limited situations in which some are unable to. One of our roles is to work with participants to identify a solution. We also work with our community partners in addressing emergency situations as they arise.

Both of our locations operate a retail storefront offering thrift (second-hand) items, but only the Urbana location has a grocery department. It is comparable to an Aldi in the number and types of items it carries. Inventory is purchased from a variety of vendors just like any other independent grocery store.

Both stores are open to the public and are staffed by regular full and part-time employees and volunteers with participants working alongside. Accepted forms of payment include cash, credit and debit cards, and participant store credit. Urbana also accepts SNAP and WIC for qualifying grocery items.

100% of the net proceeds from the store supports the store credit participants earn and the other programs and services we offer.

Sustainable Solutions

When 2014 began we had not yet decided on a timeline for implementation of the new model, so started the year with a budget that included just under \$370,000 in expenses that were 100% funded through donations from individuals, churches, and businesses. We had a staff of three part-time and three full-time employees.

In June we decided to launch the new model at the beginning of the fourth quarter. Transitioning to a retail storefront with all the programmatic changes meant an increase in staffing to 14 employees (seven full-time and seven part-time), and an almost 200% increase to the budget. Because of the revenues generated by the retail operations, however, we only needed to raise 6% more in donations than we had previously.

This year our operating budget is \$3.6M and is about 85% funded through our retail operations (grocery and thrift sales and salvage revenue), with the remaining 15% coming from donations. We have 51 employees (27 full-time and 24 part-time) and 150 participant households who are earning store credit. We currently receive no state or federal funding for any of our programs or services.



Program Value

There are four distinct ways in which this model fulfills our mission and vision:

1. It provides access to resources without the loss of dignity.

The question is NOT whether people need help meeting their basic needs. The question is, "What is the most appropriate, healthy way to meet those needs while moving families and individuals along a continuum of positive change without the loss of dignity?" Our model is the answer to that question.

Many of the people we serve have stood in line for free food or clothing but have opted out of those one-way giving models because the loss of dignity is a cost too high to pay. When given the opportunity to acquire the things they need under their own power while experiencing community and having a sense of purpose, they come.

2. It provides a sense of purpose.

What are the things people often ask upon first meeting you? Your name, probably something about your family...and what you do. How do you think you might feel if you couldn't answer the last with some meaningful endeavor or identified yourself as unemployed, disabled, or nothing?

Our self-worth is often directly tied to our sense of purpose. Because of this, identifying a sense of purpose can be a dramatically empowering first step towards affecting lasting change in a person's life.

3. It provides an opportunity to learn transferable skills.

Our expectations of our participants are no less than in any other workplace—attendance and timeliness, work ethic, and teamwork to name a few of the tangible life skills we reinforce. We provide a work environment offering skill development to people who might not otherwise have the opportunity—people fresh out of jail, people with physical, cognitive, and emotional limitations, people suffering from chronic unemployment, and the list goes on. We are both a refuge and a bridge to greater opportunities.

4. It provides an environment that fosters relationships.

Often, those in poverty live in varying degrees of isolation with a minimally effective support system. This isolation only exacerbates their situation. Through volunteering they are introduced to more individuals, which naturally broadens their network of support. As an organization, we are intentionally relational. This is above and more important than the business of the day. By developing relationships, we build trust, and this trust provides opportunities to speak into each other's lives in a meaningful way.

In addition to our credit-earning program, we host several programs and services targeted at addressing those areas which are often most crucial in equipping individuals with the tools they need to affect lasting change in their lives. Some are facilitated by us, while others are in partnership with other organizations in the community. Some examples include free tax preparation through the VITA program, regularly hosting a mobile clinic that provides a spectrum of health care along with a drug interventionist, hosting high school students with developmental disabilities who volunteer and learn life skills, providing refurbished laptops along with basic computer instruction, and hosting the area's largest Narcotics Anonymous meetings.



Next Steps

We've seen tremendous personal growth and development in the lives of those we work with, sometimes leading to employment outside of Salt & Light. While intentional, it has happened more organically than the result of a clear structure or process. Because of this, we set out to take our programming to the next level by bringing all the disparate pieces of what we had been doing into one holistic program.

In developing these next steps, we recognized we serve two fundamentally different groups of people:

1. People with the capacity for self-sustaining employment outside of Salt & Light, and
2. People for whom that is not a realistic outcome.

The second group are generally seniors and folks with significant disabilities. This group will need help acquiring basic resources (food, clothing, housing, etc.) indefinitely, and we believe the way we do this benefits them and the community far more than a food pantry does.

For the first group, the question is how we empower them to recognize, grow, and engage their capacity.

Our program will operate on two different "tracks" to facilitate growth for the two groups:

1. A "long-term" or Enrichment Track, and
2. A "short-term" or Employment Track

The Employment Track consists of four specific resources designed to support participants on their journey to self-sustaining employment:

1. Affinity Groups consisting of volunteer "Allies" and participants for mutual support and accountability.
2. Classes with curriculums focused on soft skills necessary for acquiring and maintaining employment and financial education focused on transferring basic financial management skills.
3. Participants receive coaching while working as volunteers and after successfully completing the classroom instruction will be placed in part-time employment either at Salt & Light or through community partners as they continue to grow the skills they need to be successful.
4. Support in identifying, applying, and securing full-time employment. Throughout this process they will continue to meet with their affinity group, receive support in navigating their new workplace environment, and coaching to ensure their long-term success.

We recently hired a new staff member to oversee these programmatic changes and begin implementation.



TANF Experience

Over the years we've had several people come to us through the TANF program to fulfill the work requirements for cash assistance. Most of those people were ill-prepared and confused because of poor case-management experiences, and rarely lasted more than a couple of months. The one positive experience we have had was with Jake.

Jake was a 26-year-old guy who had been in and out of trouble for much of his life. When he and his girlfriend began volunteering at Salt & Light, he was still wearing an ankle bracelet from his latest interaction with the judicial system. Both Jake and Tonya came to us as part of the TANF program. They were required to volunteer up to 20 hours per week, earning minimum wage for each of those hours.

They both had a young child from prior relationships, and as they struggled to establish a healthy environment, Jake's battles with alcohol made an already difficult situation worse. Eventually, their relationship imploded, but Jake continued to serve.

Jake was a great volunteer. He was always smiling, friendly, and willing to do whatever we asked without hesitation. As our relationship with him deepened, we encouraged him to look for real employment. We continually affirmed who he was and what he was capable of, and how he had the capacity for so much more than what he was currently experiencing. It became clear, this was not something he had heard before. He grew up in an environment where his inherent value, worth, and capacity were never acknowledged, let alone celebrated.

One day, Jake came in and sheepishly told us he had gotten a job at a fast-food restaurant. He acted somewhat embarrassed because he felt like this was not a "good" job. We instantly celebrated it. We told him how proud he should be, and happy we were for him. We encouraged him that this was just the beginning, and that he could go anywhere from here.

Within a year, Jake became the general manager of his own location, he and his son were able to get their own house, and Jake was an even more present and involved father.

While I wouldn't attribute Jake's success to TANF, I will say were it not for the work requirements, we never would have met Jake, and I'm not sure his story would have gone in the direction it did.



Broken Systems

While I do not believe simply ensuring work requirements are fulfilled and loopholes are closed will provide the kind of transformation desired, I do believe not doing so is a disservice to the people we seek to help. Having reasonable and appropriate expectations based on the capacity of the individual is not punitive or onerous, it is loving and affirming. It has been said, "people rise or fall to the level of the expectations you have for them". To have no expectations is to communicate you do not believe they have anything to offer, anything to contribute—not only in their situation, but to the community they are a part of. I can think of nothing more diminishing and disempowering to the very spirit, the very dignity of a person.

Regardless of the changes made to TANF, I have little faith any substantive widespread transformation will occur in the lives of those struggling in poverty if the states are the administrators of this program or any other welfare program. The one-size fits all approach most state and federal programs take do not allow for the kind of flexibility needed to effectively work with families whose situations and obstacles vary from one neighbor to the next, let alone from one end of the state to the other.

In my opinion, the disparate welfare programs aimed at reducing poverty should be consolidated into one holistic program facilitated by non-governmental organizations. Most individuals who are struggling rarely face challenges in meeting just one area of basic need and the fact that pursuing the supports you need to move forward can be a full-time job is illogical and inhumane. This consolidation could also significantly reduce the cost of implementation by improving efficiencies and reducing administration—allowing for more of the dollars to go to the people who need the help.

From the federal perspective, I can understand where administration through the states may be more administratively efficient, but it is clearly programmatically ineffective. It is time we stop doing what is easy and start doing what is right.

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Subcommittee Chairman LaHood, Ranking Member Davis, and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Montgomery. I next recognize Mr. Butler.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN BUTLER, DIRECTOR OF RESIDENTIAL MINISTRIES, PATHWAY MINISTRIES

Mr. BUTLER. Thank you, Chairman LaHood, Chairman Smith, and Ranking Member Mr. Davis, and the rest of the distinguished committee for having us here today.

I will give you a little history of Pathway Ministries. We were founded in 1955 after 2 ladies visited right here at the Pacific Garden Mission. They came back to Peoria and started serving coffee and donuts and sharing the gospel of Christ with men who were experiencing homelessness.

The ministry now operates across 7 different facilities, serving nearly 2,000 individuals each year. We average more than 160 men and women staying in our facilities every night. In 2023 we served more than 100,000 meals, provided over 50,000 nights of shelter, and graduated 151 men and women from our residential programs. Those programs include varying aspects of education, counseling, life skills, and work readiness training.

Our Pathway Works provides critical job readiness opportunities for our students within commercial enterprises, and our ministries of Empower Life and Barnabas Counseling serve our community by offering life-affirming assistance, parenting classes, and clinical counseling.

Our mission is to create pathways out of poverty through Jesus with our neighbors in need. That mission begins with the different view of poverty than most. We don't view poverty as simply a lack of material things or even housing. We believe poverty is more complex, and is the result of brokenness in the four fundamental relationships of life: our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others, and with creation or our work.

We believe that Jesus came to restore not just our relationship with God, but to renew all four of these relationships. And we all need renewal because at some level we are all poor. Poverty will look different for each of us, and most of the men and women we serve are experiencing devastating effects from their brokenness in one or more of these relationships. They not only seek to seek shelter, but a pathway to stability. And one of the most important aspects of that path will be the dignity and sustainability that work provides.

I have personally experienced the value of this approach, as my own pathway out of poverty includes a lifestyle of drug addiction and alcoholism, trying to be a gangster, and eventually prison. But Jesus restored and renewed my relationships with Himself, with myself, with others, and with my ability to work. We believe this pathway begins with compassionate crisis care, meeting people where they are at with love and support, and that path includes two programs or avenues our guests can choose from.

Our Next Step program focuses primarily on vocation. Our advisors assist guests as they learn to take their next step towards spiritual freedom, personal responsibility, and self-sufficiency.

The Second Avenue is our renewal program, which is a residential recovery-based program. This opportunity is nine months long,

is Jesus-centered, and allows students time to dig deep and focus on repairing those relationships I just spoke about.

All of our programing, from crisis care to renewal, has some form of work included. It might be just getting up in the morning and making your bed, doing daily chores, or participating in our job readiness training programs.

Finally, we also offer our students who graduate from our programs the option of joining our graduate society, where they can live up to three years in an affordable and accountable environment.

In regards to our work readiness classes and on-the-job training, we focus on the skills everyone needs to be successful. We have partnered with Caterpillar for over 25 years, recycling their wood waste and teaching students those various skills. We also partner with other work readiness programs such as Illinois Central College's Workforce Certification Program to support students in finding work that they love.

One of our students, TJ, just completed the ICC's truck driver training program, and now drives for PepsiCo, and makes a really good wage. Erica also graduated from ICC, and she is now employed as a second-year carpenter, helping to install one of the largest solar fields in Illinois. And more importantly, Erica has been reunited with her five-year-old son, Michael. Both of these former students are now living on their own, earning living-wage incomes, and have a renewed sense of purpose and dignity. And there are many more like TJ and Erica, because in the past four years we have helped more than 600 men and women find jobs, and we have assisted more than 400 men and women in securing permanent housing.

We have learned that when people grasp the dignity of work and the value of providing for themselves financially, they are empowered to live lives that bring life to the Peoria community. These folks are moving from costing our community to contributing to our community. We are putting people to work who pay taxes and spend their money in Peoria. We are adding members to local churches. We are able to experience with our students that joy when they get their first paycheck. We see the freedom that comes from people paying off debt when they thought they never could.

But the most rewarding time comes when we are able to see the power of God in our students to see themselves correctly, and to live with the dignity that comes from work. It is not an easy path, but by working on those four fundamental relationships with Christ we see Him not only bring eternal life, but a renewed life now. We watch Him provide that pathway out of poverty.

Thanks again, Chairmen Smith, LaHood, and Ranking Member Davis, and the rest of you. God bless you.

[The statement of Mr. Butler follows:]

Brian Butler, Director of Residential Ministries
Pathway Ministries

Testimony for Ways and Means Committee
Subcommittee on Work and Welfare
“Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty”
Field Hearing - Chicago, Illinois
April 9th, 2024

My name is Brian Butler, and I am the Director of Residential Ministries at Pathway Ministries located in Peoria, Illinois.

I grew up in southern Illinois with hard working parents and learned the value of work at an early age. However, my early years were full of substance abuse, dysfunction, and continual family break ups. I left home after I graduated High School and continued my journey into alcoholism, drug use and eventually homelessness. In 2003 at the age of 40 I was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in the Indiana Department of Corrections for selling drugs, carjacking, and auto theft. It was at the beginning of my incarceration that I met Jesus and He began to turn my life around. In prison I was disciplined by Chaplains and met men in Christ who valued servanthood and work. It was there that I truly learned the value of work and education. During my incarceration I earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from Indiana State University, worked two jobs, volunteered in Church activities teaching Christian 12 Step classes and tutored men in the GED program. I served 6 years and 105 days, not that I was counting.

In 2009 I arrived in Peoria, Illinois where I lived with my daughter, got a job washing cars and a job at The Salvation Army working as a monitor in their homeless shelter for men. In 2011 TSA received a grant to implement a daytime Drop-in-Center for the homeless and I was given the opportunity to be a case manager. I was able to use some old TSA Work Therapy Material and create a Work Therapy program of our own at that location. People off the street went to classes about work, did mock interviews and learned skillsets that taught them how to be good employees and the benefits of being a good employee. But the real transformation took place when we gave them responsibilities at the Drop-in -Center that mimicked real jobs. We had former prostitutes working our reception area and ex-convicts serving food. We had hard core substance abuse users as teachers' aides and we saw countless others who were tired and broken come to life, because they saw and felt

value in themselves as they learned the value of service and work in a variety of different roles.

In 2014 I was called by God's Grace to what was then Peoria Rescue Ministries and is now Pathway Ministries. Our ministry was founded in 1955 after 2 ladies toured Pacific Garden Mission and came back to Peoria to begin serving coffee and donuts and sharing the love of God with men who were experiencing homelessness. The ministry has grown to now operate across 7 different facilities with more than 75 committed staff members serving nearly 2000 individuals across our residential and advocacy ministries. We average more than 160 men and women staying with us on a nightly basis. In the past year we served more than 100,000 meals and provided over 50,000 nights of shelter. Last year we graduated 151 folks from our Residential Programs that include varying aspects of education, counseling, life skill attainment, and work-readiness training. We are a Gospel-Centered, Ministry of Mercy that comes alongside our neighbors in need and walks with them on a pathway from poverty to progress. We serve adult men and women struggling with homelessness, abuse, addiction, and abandonment through our live-in residential ministries. And we serve our community neighbors through our Advocacy ministries of Empower Life and Barnabas Counseling Centers.

I started my career at Pathway as the Assistant Director of the Rescue Mission. At that time 85% of our focus was on crisis care: providing overnight shelter, meals, and clothing for men who were homeless. We did, however, have our men's work program at Victory Acres for men who came in with addictions and other life controlling issues that wanted a program to help overcome their current lifestyle. The men worked with wood waste, building pallets, and producing mulch. At that time the VA program had a spiritual aspect but was more labor intensive and lacked the whole person approach we use now at Pathway.

In 2018 under our new Executive Director, Jon Rocke, I was given the task of directing programs. I was able to write a new vocational program called Next Step and with our new ministry philosophy of creating pathways out of poverty through Jesus with our neighbors in need, we were able to revamp our Victory Acres program to a more holistic, whole person approach.

Since that time Pathways focus has completely changed. We went from an 85% focus on crisis care and a 15% focus on transformational care to now a 85% focus on transformational programming and a 15% focus on crisis. While the pathway to transformation is usually met in crisis, we continue to meet people right where they're at when they come through our doors. The difference now is that we offer various programs to

get people out of crisis who no longer want to be in crisis and into transformation. We focus on poverty at the individual level.

Our mission is to create pathways out of poverty through Jesus with our neighbors in need. It begins with our understanding of poverty. We don't see poverty as simply a lack of material things like money or a home. We believe poverty is more complex – that poverty is the result of brokenness in the 4 fundamental relationships of life – our relationship with God, our relationship with ourselves, our relationship with others, and our relationship with the rest of Creation or work. We've all experienced brokenness in those four relationships so at some level we all experience poverty. We believe that Jesus came to renew and restore not just our relationship with God but all four of those relationships and that when those relationships are renewed, we can flourish as God intends us to.

Poverty will look different for each of us and some of our neighbors are experiencing devastating effects and circumstances from poverty such as homelessness, abuse, addiction, and abandonment. We seek to surround those folks with the love and support of a community that will provide shelter and stability but more than that will invite them on a pathway out of poverty. A significant aspect of the path will be the dignity and sustainability that work can provide. We have been created to work – to provide for ourselves as we are able and to care for and serve others and work is how we can do that.

Pathway Ministries has partnered with Caterpillar for more than 25 years to provide an environmentally sustainable wood waste recycling program that takes wood waste and turns it into rebuilt pallets through our Peoria Pallet Works Enterprise. In 2023 our students built over 104,000 pallets and over 2000 truckloads of wood waste was recycled. Wood that can't be recycled or rebuilt into pallets is turned into premium mulch through our Peoria Mulch Enterprise. In 2023 Peoria Mulch produced over 10,000 cubic yards of premium mulch. Our students work at Peoria Mulch producing mulch as well as delivering and spreading mulch for customers. It's a wonderful experience for the customers and the students. And soon Pathway Ministries will be training students in our Reclaimed brand of home décor items that celebrate the wood and lives that have been rejected by some but are being reclaimed for good by God.

Our residential work-readiness classes and training focus on the soft skills everyone needs to excel in employment. We also partner with Educational and Work-Readiness partners as needed, to support and prepare students for the work they would like to do. We provide GED classes and tutoring. Building partnerships with entities in our community has played an important role in providing our guests/students with employment opportunities and sustainable income. One of those partnerships has been with Illinois Central College and their workforce certification program. We have had several students who have

participated in these programs and went on to really good jobs. One man, TJ, who went to ICC's truck driver training program got a job locally with Nussbaum trucking and drove over the road for a year. TJ eventually got married and now drives a truck for Pepsico in Indianapolis, Indiana making a sustainable living wage. Ericka, a former student, also went to ICC Workforce program, graduated, and is now employed as a second-year carpenter at the McCarthy company helping to install one of the largest solar fields in Illinois called Black Diamond. Ericka has also been reunited with her 5-year-old son, Michael. They are living on their own and are staying on the pathway out of poverty. We partner with many employers who have very good manufacturing jobs who recognize how our work-readiness emphasis and programs prepare good team members. Many of our students go on to further their education (which we support with scholarships) or higher-level skill training programs to achieve their hopes of a fulfilling career. In the past 4 years we have placed more than 600 men and women in employment and assisted more than 400 men and women in securing Permanent Housing.

Our Next Step programs at Pathway Ministries are a 90-day commitment, however each participant can stay past 90 days if they are actively engaging in their guest advocacy plan. Each participant is required to be accountable in their finances, to save and budget their income, meet with their Pathway Advisor weekly, and work on moving forward in accordance to meet their agreed upon goals. Pathway Advisor meetings may include, but are not limited to helping our students find employment and/or our job-readiness training, housing, medical healthcare, mental/behavioral healthcare, identification documents, social services, education services, recovery services, etc. Next Step encourages our participants to take their next step forward toward personal responsibility and self-sufficiency as they partner with Christ and Pathway Ministries. Next Step students could receive stipends in our job readiness program up to \$50 per day. We provide transportation passes and laundry vouchers for men and women in our Next Step programs and teach them daily life skills to prepare them for self-sufficiency when they move out on their own. Heartland Health services provide Pathway Ministries on-site health clinics to address students and guests' physical and mental health needs.

Our Renewal Programs are nine-month residential treatment programs. Our programs are Christ-centered and are focused on a whole person approach for transformation. This approach includes restoring mental health, physical health, emotional health, relational health, and spiritual health. Our curriculum includes addiction recovery and support programs, classes on healthy relationships and codependency, conflict management, professional counseling and trauma care, and work readiness. We provide case management for all medical and legal needs. Students live on-site and are escorted to and from appointments, local court appearances (distance appearances we advocate

for Zoom), Sunday morning church and extracurricular activities by staff members. Students are expected to attend classes and complete their homework assignments, participate in counseling and addiction recovery programs, submit to random drug and alcohol screens, complete job-readiness assignments and maintain healthy relationships with staff and students. Students earn a stipend of \$50 per week and receive the stipend upon completion of the renewal program.

We have a Graduate Society for students who successfully complete our programs where they can continue to receive services and support from us for up to 3 years at our men's 1212 Community Apartment Building or our Knoxville Ave and Allen Road locations for women. Graduates pay affordable rent and can continue to restore their lives financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Graduates agree to be held accountable in their work lives and financial lives with our Aftercare Ministry Coordinator.

Let's not forget that work can be hard. Working in the summer sun building pallets or delivering mulch on a cold spring day can be less than comfortable and emotions can run hot. Our students are surrounded by staff who can help them work through situations that may occur at any workplace. We help our students navigate those emotions and compulsions so that they are prepared in the future when those situations arise on the job. Our students have counseling on site, at the residential center where they reside, and they also have access to the Barnabas Counseling Center. Barnabas Counseling is also a member of Pathway Ministries where we offer licensed clinical counseling to our students and the Peoria community.

We have learned that when people are taught the dignity of work and the value of providing for themselves financially, they are empowered to live lives that bring life to the Peoria community. Pathway Ministries is growing the local church with new members and the economic gain to Peoria by new taxpayers makes a difference in many arenas. Working with our guests and experiencing with them their first paychecks, paying off debts, saving for their future and moving out on their own without financial assistance from the government empowers them to stay out of the poverty cycle that they were stuck in when they came to us. It's not an easy fix but by working on those 4 fundamental relationships Jesus does provide a pathway out of poverty.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Butler. I now recognize Ms. Schofield.

**STATEMENT OF KRISTY SCHOFIELD, DIRECTOR OF
HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING, DREAM CENTER PEORIA**

Ms. SCHOFIELD. Good morning, Chairman Smith, Chairman LaHood, and Ranking Member Davis, members of the committee. My name is Kristy Schofield, and I am director of homeless and housing for the Dream Center Peoria. But 27 years ago I was a homeless mother, sleeping in my car with my four-year-old son and my three-year-old daughter. I had run from a marriage filled with domestic violence and was suffering from a depression so deep, so dark I was not functional as a person or a parent.

I know the pain of having your children hungry but having nothing to give them, having them cry because they are scared and not being able to make them feel safe. But God had a bigger purpose with this, and I found the very shelter and housing programs that I now direct, and I got what I needed to become self-sustaining. And I was so grateful that I have spent the last 25 years working with these programs as the director.

The work that I do, the accomplishments have given back the self-esteem that I lost through the homelessness. At the Dream Center Peoria, women, children, and families are receiving life-changing services, and I am so blessed to work for an organization that gives our guests the second chance of life, and works so hard to help them become self-sustaining. I am also so honored to be able to give those the gift that I was given.

At DCP I see so many broken and homeless. Even though they become homeless for a myriad of reasons—unemployment, under-employment, substance abuse, mental health—the common thread in so many cases is the lack of self-esteem and self belief in what they can achieve. That self-esteem and belief can be rebuilt through accomplishment and achievement.

We partner with programs such as workforce development, Illinois Central College adult education, and more. We offer trades program on site for those interested in culinary, auto, small engine repair, screen printing, coding, and a complete coffee program that allows students to learn the coffee world from roasting the beans, packaging, marketing, and sales.

These programs give our guests an opportunity to work and, with that, accomplish and achieve, thereby gaining that self-esteem and belief in themselves and lowering the chance that they will live in poverty.

We also partner with the Department of Children and Family Services, our programs being an opportunity to keep families together, which is the goal, to bring safety and stability to the household.

One family in our program is a single mother household, lost her children to DCFS a little over a year-and-a-half ago. She had been unsuccessful at managing employment due to substance abuse issues, and her children were placed in foster care. She began counseling, treatment, and a workforce initiative we partner with. She has secured full-time employment, and has even worked her way into shift management. These achievements have given her a

greater sense of belief in herself, and she is on the path to return of her children within the next three months.

It is our belief that work builds self-esteem, provides families that have struggled to sustain a better chance at long-term success.

So many years of working in these programs have given me a sense of accomplishment, pride, and self worth. I know firsthand the difference work and becoming self-sustaining makes in someone's lives. You see, 27 years ago, when I was in my car with my kids, I lowered my pride and I called my ex to beg for help. And he said to me, "I told you when you left that you would have nothing." Well, 27 years later, a lot of hard work, myself, my children, and now my grandchildren, we have everything.

Chairman Smith, Chairman LaHood, and Ranking Member Davis, members of the committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to share my story, my life as well, and all that the Dream Center Peoria does for our area's most vulnerable.

[The statement of Ms. Schofield follows:]



dream center peoria

turning dreams into reality

April 5, 2024

Good morning,

My name is Kristy Schofield and I am Director of Homeless & Housing for the Dream Center Peoria.

27 years ago I was a Homeless mother sleeping in my car with my 4 year old son and 3 year old daughter. I had run from a marriage filled with Domestic Violence and was suffering from depression that was so deep and so dark, that I was not functional as a person or a parent. I know the pain of having your children hungry but having nothing to give them, having them cry because they are scared, and not being able to make them feel safe. **But God had a bigger purpose**, and I found the very Shelter and housing programs that I now direct, and I was given a second chance at life. The shelter and then the Housing gave me the support I needed to become self-sustaining. I am so grateful for what I was given, so grateful in fact, that I have spent the last 25 years working with those programs as Director. The work that I do, the accomplishments, have given me back the self-esteem that I lost through the DV and homelessness.

At Dream Center Peoria, Women, Children & Families are receiving life changing services and I am so blessed to work for an organization that gives our guests a 2nd chance at life and works so hard to help them become self-sustaining. I am ALSO so honored to be able to give others the gift that I was given.

At DCP I see so many broken and homeless. Even though, they become homeless for a myriad of reasons, un-employment, under-employment, substance abuse or mental health, the common thread in so many cases is the lack of self-esteem and belief in what they can achieve.

That self-esteem and belief can be rebuilt through accomplishment and achievements. We partner with programs such as Workforce Development, Illinois Central College, Adult Education and more. We offer a trades program onsite for those interested in Culinary, Auto and Small Engine Repair, Screen printing, Coding and a complete coffee program that allows students to learn the coffee world from roasting the beans to packaging, marketing and sales. These programs give our guests an opportunity to work and with that, accomplish and achieve, thereby gaining self-esteem and belief in themselves.

We are also partner with the Department of Children & Family Services, Our programs being an opportunity to keep families together and bring safety & stability to the household.

One family in our programs, a single mother household, lost her children to DCFS a little over a year and ½ ago, she had been unsuccessful at managing employment due to substance abuse issues and her children were placed in foster care. She began counseling, treatment and a workforce initiative we partner with. She has secured full time employment and has even worked her way into shift management. These achievements have given her a greater sense of belief in herself and she is on the path to the return of her children within the next three months.

It is our believe that works builds self-esteem, provides families, that have struggled to sustain, a better chance at long term success.

So many years of working in these programs have given me a sense of accomplishment, pride and self-worth. I know first-hand the difference work and becoming self-sustaining, makes in someone lives. You see 27 years ago when I was in that car with my children, I called my ex-husband to beg for help. He told me, "see I told you, when you left me, you would have nothing." Well 27 years of hard work later and by the Grace of God, my children... me.... we have everything. Myself, my children with their children are now self-sustaining working families.

Chairman Smith, LaHood and Ranking Member Davis, Members of the committee, Thank you so much for the opportunity to share my life and testimony as well as all that Dream Center Peoria does for the most vulnerable in our area.

Kristy Schofield
Director of Homeless & Housing
Dream Center Peoria

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Ms. Schofield. We will now recognize Mr. Caldwell.

STATEMENT OF GIANNO CALDWELL, FOUNDER, CALDWELL STRATEGIC CONSULTING

Mr. CALDWELL. Good morning, Chairman LaHood, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Davis, and all the members of the committee. Thank you, Chairman, for giving me the time to speak before your committee regarding both my professional experience and personal experience growing up within the welfare system.

I grew up on the South Side of Chicago. During that time, for many years, my mother was addicted to crack cocaine, and our family only endured via government housing and welfare. But a government check can only do so much.

In my experience, there are two kinds of people who get on government assistance. The first is those who really don't have a choice. They see government assistance as a temporary measure to help them get through a rough patch to get back on their feet, which is how the system was originally created. But in the last 50 years it has become a way of life for many Americans, a permanent solution. And the promise of the so-called Great Society became a trap for millions of Americans. In many cases, those who get on government assistance too often get comfortable and figure out how to manipulate the system as much as possible so they can continue on the same pathway going forward. I have seen such thinking take down even the strongest of people.

For years my grandmother was our family's saving grace. She would visit us in our apartment in a government housing project on the South Side, where drugs and gangs were in every hallway, and she would come in with bags of groceries and shoes that she bought us from Payless Shoe Store. She tried to take care of us from afar, but eventually she had seen enough, and my siblings and I moved in with her.

She was a no-nonsense woman of faith and industry. Nana, as we called her, worked 10 hours a day as a private duty nurse, and we were doing okay for a while until our Nana's car was struck by a habitual drunk driver. And this woman, who worked hard her entire life, could no longer do her job. Her back brought agony with every step. She tried to work a reduced schedule, and was now doing overnight shifts, harder on her life and well-being, but easier on her body. But then she couldn't even do that anymore.

The government checks began to arrive again. Not for my mom anymore, but for my grandmother. When you get into this dependency mentality, it changes everything. Your focus can change. Your thoughts too quickly becomes how can I get more, more housing, more food stamps, more cash from the government. My grandmother's desire to work the system all too quickly took on a life of its own. People in my community would come around and say, "Listen, these are the kinds of things that I have been pulling off to get more of this or more of that," and my grandmother would lean into it.

One can completely lose their pride as they try to figure out how to survive by working the system. Even more tragically, you begin to pass down these tactics to your family and those around you.

I got into public service volunteering for my local alderman at 14, and my first job working part-time for the Social Security Administration by 16. But there were times in my teens I was told not to work because it could jeopardize the government assistance our family was receiving. Even then, the idea was both astonishing and horrifying to me.

But I don't necessarily blame my grandmother for that. Poverty and government dependence don't just affect your bank account. Eventually, it begins to affect your mind. You see nothing but what is in front of you. And when what is in front of you is a politician with another handout, watch out. How many Americans have accepted the narrative that only government handouts are the answer to all that ails? Too many.

More often than not, the people around me weren't simply deciding to give up, they were living in a culture of dependency that they passed down from birth. Both my grandmother and my mother gave in to that culture, and they expected me to figure out the best way to live on that same track, for in neighborhoods like the one I grew up in there is no perceived incentive to advance. After all, the checks for housing and food stamps and other assistance arrive every month.

This is why the system must be reformed. Welfare should only exist for a certain period of time, unless you are totally disabled and can't physically work. It should not last for a generation. The government should instead provide more incentives for real-world training and education to recipients about a life beyond government dependence.

I believe reforms to welfare should be approached with the same bipartisan spirit that Speaker Newt Gingrich and President Bill Clinton had during the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, a bipartisan compromise, an overhaul that significantly changed our nation's welfare system to require work in exchange for time-limited assistance and supports. Its official name was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.

Personal responsibility. It has been almost 20 years since we revisited and recommitted to this idea. Many will point to institutional racism or generations of poverty that have been—that have made it tougher for many, particularly Blacks in the inner cities, to succeed. Truthfully, racism has had an impact on many people. However, citing racism as the sole reason for a lack of success is merely another trap meant to keep underprivileged people dependent. People have to want the power that comes with personal responsibility. But first they need to even know such capability and power exist.

There is not one government handout that can pour into you the desire to better your own life. As Ronald Reagan once warned, we should measure welfare success by how many people leave welfare, not by how many are added. He understood, as I do from firsthand experience, that those trapped within government assistance will eventually devalue their own lives, so much so that life itself would take on little meaning. Thus, the shootings and teenagers ready to murder without hesitation as easily as grabbing a bite to eat.

Morally, throwing more money at the problem is clearly not the answer. Until we have the courage to articulate and address the

issues of personal responsibility, or better parenting, schooling, accountability, then whatever welfare we pander will only make things worse. There is no doubt that our cities are crying out for help, as my family did many years ago. But we answer that—by how we answer that cry will determine the level of dependency or success for future millions of Americans. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Caldwell follows:]

Gianno Caldwell, Founder
Caldwell Strategic Consulting

Testimony for Ways and Means Committee
Subcommittee on Work and Welfare
“Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty”
Field Hearing - Chicago, Illinois
April 9th, 2024

Good morning, Chairman LaHood and Ranking Member Davis and all the members of this committee.

Thank you, Chairman, for giving me the time to speak before your committee regarding both my personal experience growing up within the welfare system and my professional reflections on the matter.

I grew up on the Southside of Chicago. During that time, for many years my mother was addicted to crack cocaine and our family endured only via government housing and welfare. But a government can only do so much.

In my experience, there are two kinds of people who get on government assistance. The first is those – who really don't have a choice. They see government assistance as a *temporary* measure to help get through a rough patch and get back on their feet. Which is how the system was originally created.

But in the last fifty years, it has become a way of life for many Americans. A *permanent* solution. And the promise of the so-called “Great Society” became a trap for millions of Americans. In many cases, those who get on government assistance, too often get comfortable, and figure out how to manipulate the system as much as possible so they can continue on that same pathway going forward.

I've seen such thinking take down even the strongest of people.

For years, my grandmother was our family's saving grace. She'd visit our apartment in a government housing project on the South Side – where drugs and gangs were in every hallway– and she would come in with bags of groceries and shoes that she bought us from Payless. She tried to take care of us from afar, but eventually she had seen enough and my siblings and I moved in with her. She was a no-nonsense woman of faith and industry. Nana as we called her worked ten hours a day as a private duty nurse and we were doing okay... for a while.

Until our Nana's car was struck by a habitual drunk driver and this woman, who'd worked hard her entire life, could no longer do her job. Her back brought agony with every step. She

tried to work a reduced schedule and was now doing overnight shifts – harder on her life and well-being, but easier on her body—but then she couldn't even do that anymore. The government checks began to arrive again. Not for my mom anymore, but for my grandmother.

When you get into this dependency mentality, it changes everything. Your focus can . . . change. Your thought too quickly becomes: *How can I get more?* More housing, more food stamps, more cash. *From the government.* My grandmother's desire to work the system all too quickly took on a life of its own. People in the community would come around and say, "Listen, these are the kinds of things I've been pulling off to get more of this and that." And my grandmother would lean into it. One can completely lose their pride as they try to figure out how to survive by working the system. Even more tragically, you begin to pass down these tactics to your family and those around you.

I got into public service volunteering at the local Alderman's office at fourteen and my first job working part-time for the Social Security Administration by sixteen. But there were times in my teens I was told not to work because it could jeopardize the government assistance our family was receiving. Even then, the idea was both astonishing, and horrifying to me.

But I don't necessarily blame my grandmother for that. Poverty and government dependence don't just affect your bank account. Eventually, it begins to affect your mind. You see nothing but what's in front of you. And when what's in front of you is a politician with another handout: *Watch Out!*

How many Americans have accepted the narrative that only government handouts are the answer to all that ails? Too many. More often than not, the people around me weren't simply deciding to give up. They were living in a culture of dependency that'd been passed down from birth. Both my mother and grandmother gave in to that culture. And they expected me figure out the best way to live on that same track.

For in neighborhoods like the one I grew up, there is no perceived incentive to advance. After all, the checks for housing and the food stamps and other assistance arrive every month.

This is why the system must be reformed. Welfare should exist only for a certain period of time, unless you're totally disabled and can't physically work. It should not last for a generation. The government should, instead, provide more incentives for real-world training and education to recipients about a life *beyond* government dependence.

I believe reforms to welfare should be approached with the same bipartisan spirit that Speaker Newt Gingrich and President Bill Clinton had during the 1996 Welfare Reform Act—a bipartisan compromise and overhaul – that significantly changed our nation's welfare system to require work in exchange for *time-limited* assistance and supports. Its official name was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Personal responsibility. It's been almost twenty years since we've revisited, and recommitted, to this idea.

Many will point to institutional racism or generations of poverty that have made it tougher for many – particularly Blacks in our inner cities – to succeed. Truthfully, racism has had an impact on many people, however, citing racism as the sole reason for a lack of success is merely another trap meant to keep underprivileged people dependent.

People have to *want* the power that comes with personal responsibility. But first they need to even know that such capability and power exist. There is not one government handout that can pour into you the desire to better your own life. As Ronald Reagan once warned: We should measure welfare's success by how many people leave welfare... not by how many are added.

He understood – as do I from firsthand experiences – that those trapped within government assistance will eventually *devalue their own lives*. So much so, that life itself would take on little meaning. Thus, the shootings and teenagers ready to murder without hesitation, as easily as grabbing a bite to eat.

Merely throwing more money at this “problem” is *clearly* not the answer. Until we have the courage to articulate and address issues of personal responsibility – of better parenting, schooling, accountability – then whatever welfare we pander with is only making things worse. There is no doubt that our cities are crying out for help – as my family did many years ago. But how we answer that cry will determine the level of dependency or success for future millions across America.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Caldwell. We will now recognize Ms. Williams as our last witness.

**STATEMENT OF SODIQA WILLIAMS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
SAFER FOUNDATION**

Ms. WILLIAMS. Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Smith, Chairman LaHood, and Ranking Member Davis, and all the members of the committee. My name is Sodiqa Williams, and I am senior vice president of reentry services for the Safer Foundation.

Thank you for providing this time and space to give testimony. It is especially appropriate, given April is Second Chance Month, the time when Congress and our nation raise awareness about the successes and challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals in our society. During Second Chance Month, we promote policies, programs, and opportunities that support rehabilitation and reintegration for the one in three Americans who carry the lifetime burden of an arrest and conviction record.

The Safer Foundation was launched in 1972 by two men of the cloth, Bernie Curran and Gus Wilhelmy, to provide non-sectarian mentoring and workforce development services to people returning to the community from jail and prison. For 52 years Safer Foundation has provided a full spectrum of reentry, workforce development, and rehabilitation services for men and women, youth and adults in Iowa and Illinois. Today we are a national leader in supporting the efforts of people with arrest and conviction records to become employed and productive members of the community.

Since 1972 our work has expanded to include academic and vocational career education, community corrections, and education services inside of Cook County Jail, the nation's largest single-site detention center. More recently, Safer has been the lead agency in the Innovative Supportive Reentry Network Collaborative. This is a holistic, comprehensive reentry navigation model providing stable housing, substance use and mental health treatment, physical health care services, job readiness, documentation assistance, and job placement services.

I want to speak a few moments to the issue of high-quality, living-wage work. People with arrest and conviction records need high-quality living-wage employment opportunities to defeat recidivism. Several years ago, Safer partnered with JPMorgan Chase on the JPMorgan Second Chance Hiring pilot. That program connected individuals with arrest and conviction records to substantive living-wage careers in the financial services sector, where demand for skilled labor is high.

Research suggests that post-prison, high-quality, higher-wage employment results in fewer arrests or returns to prison when compared to low-wage, low-job-quality employment. The pilot's success was demonstrated by JPMorgan Chase's increase in the hiring of people with arrest and conviction records, and contributed to the launch of the Second Chance Business Coalition, highlighting a broader shift towards inclusive employment practices within the financial industry.

High-quality, living-wage work is pro-social and improves self-esteem, and is a positive use of time. Knowing your work will provide

for your way of life makes a difference that gives you self-esteem and confidence.

High-quality, living-wage work through reentry is critical to the success of the nation's economy. People with arrest and conviction records are one of the largest untapped pools of labor available to U.S. businesses. The current demand for qualified workers is high and, according to the National Federation of Independent Businesses, many unemployed individuals do not meet the qualifications for industries that are hiring. Fifty-five percent of business owners reported hiring or trying to hire. Eighty-nine percent of those hiring or trying to hire reported few or no qualified applicants for available positions.

What can Congress do? We urge the Congress to fund \$135 million for the Reentry Employment Opportunities, RIO, program at the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, which provides workforce development and reentry services to people with criminal legal histories, while helping employers identify trained and credentialed employees to hire for their open positions.

We urge the Congress to fund \$125 million for the Second Chance Act program at the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to provide reentry services and supports nationwide.

Finally, we urge that Congress create new legislation that removes the more than 44,000 state and Federal legal collateral consequences creating lifetime barriers that impede the social development of individuals and their families from the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. When we make nominal investments in people's efforts to secure private-sector employment through reentry, the beneficiaries include all of us: taxpayers, government, families, and communities. Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Williams follows:]

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORK AND WELFARE
JOINT HEARING ON “THE DIGNITY OF WORK:
LIFTING AMERICANS OUT OF POVERTY”
Ms. Sodiqa Williams, Senior Vice President, Safer Foundation, Esq.

April 9, 2024

Introduction:

Subcommittee Chairperson Darin LaHood, Subcommittee Ranking Member Danny K. Davis, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee – good morning,

My name is Sodiqa Williams, I am Senior Vice President of Reentry Services for the **Safer Foundation (Safer)**. Thank you for providing this time and space to give testimony. It is especially appropriate because April is Second Chance Month – the time when Congress and our nation raise awareness about the successes and challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals in our society. During Second Chance Month we promote policies, programs, and opportunities that support rehabilitation and reintegration for the 1 in 3 Americans who carry the lifetime burden of an arrest or conviction record.¹

The Safer Foundation was launched in 1972 by two men of the cloth, Bernie Curran, and Gus Wilhelmy to provide non-sectarian mentoring and workforce development services to people returning to the community from jail and prison. Bernie & Gus believed then, as we do now, that helping people returning from incarceration secure private-sector employment builds a more solid foundation for their lives and makes our communities safer. They put those two ideas together and named the organization Safer Foundation. What Bernie & Gus knew to be true in 1972, is still true today!

For 52 years, Safer Foundation has provided a full spectrum of re-entry workforce development and rehabilitation services to men and women, adults, and youth, in Illinois & Iowa. Today, we are a national leader in supporting the efforts of people with arrest and conviction records to become employed, and productive members of the community. Since 1972 our work has expanded to include academic and vocational career education, community corrections, where we operate two residential work release centers housing over 600 men for one to two years before their release from state prison, education services inside of Cook County jail, the nation’s largest single-site detention center. We provide services to individuals in our local specialty courts like the drug court, and those on parole or mandatory supervised release from our state prisons. Our Youth Empowerment Programs in Illinois and Iowa provide academic education, cognitive behavioral therapy, mentoring, job readiness, and placement services to justice-involved youth 16-24 years old.

Safer Foundation assists up to 1,500 clients each year to obtain high-quality private-sector employment in industries critical to our regional economic success. Our clients are employed in Healthcare, Transportation/Distribution/Logistics, Manufacturing, Construction, IT, Financial Services, Hospitality, and Food Services. Our Safer Demand Skills Collaborative model was created to build connections between employers, training partners, and our workforce development services to enable clients to earn industry-recognized credentials and secure living wage employment in industries with high labor demands.

In recent years, Safer - partnered with JPMorgan Chase on the JPMorgan Second Chance Hiring Pilot. That program connected individuals with criminal records to substantive, living-wage careers, in the financial services sector where demand for skilled labor is high. Research suggests that post-prison high-quality, higher-wage employment results in fewer arrests or returns to prison when compared to low-wage, low-job quality employment.² The pilot's success was demonstrated by JPMorgan Chase's significant increase in the hiring of people with criminal records, and contributed to the launch of the Second Chance Business Coalition, highlighting a broader shift towards inclusive employment practices within the financial industry.³

For the past 4 years, we have also been the lead agency in the Supportive Reentry Network Collaborative - a holistic, comprehensive, reentry navigation model providing stable housing, substance use disorder and mental health treatment, ambulatory physical healthcare services, job readiness and placement services. The SRNC model addresses public safety through reduced recidivism and public health by addressing the social determinants of health. Two of the most expensive systems for American taxpayers are the prison and jail systems and the healthcare system. People returning from jail and prison are central to addressing public safety and public health. These initiatives highlight Safer's expertise in facilitating access to high-quality, living wage employment that offers stability, dignity, and growth opportunities, to the individuals we serve, and thus counter the misconceptions and stereotypes about the employability of justice-involved individuals.

Safer Foundation programs improve public safety by reducing recidivism, the percentage of people who commit new crimes, arrests, convictions, detentions, reconvictions, and re-incarceration. In Illinois, each person who experiences recidivism costs our state taxpayers over \$150,000.⁴ At Safer, we work diligently to provide living-wage job readiness training, vocational training, and job placement services to returning residents. That work has included serving as a site for US Department of Labor Training-to-Work programs, a workforce development program that enabled over 300 clients to obtain industry-recognized credentials. Only 11% of the first training-to-work cohort and 9% of the second cohort of trainees were re-arrested a year after receiving services, well below the national re-arrest rate of 40%.⁵

People returning from incarceration are disproportionately homeless, food insecure, unemployed, and have physical and mental health issues.⁶ They are far more likely to use the most expensive healthcare available in the US, the emergency room. Our SRNC model ensures that they get connected to preventive care soon after their return to the community, reducing the reliance on emergency room services. Safer Foundation's services improve public safety and public health, a valuable benefit to our society.

The Value of High-Quality Living-Wage Work

The US has over 2 million people in prisons and jails.⁷ In our country, over 3 million people are on probation or parole.⁸ Over 75 million Americans, nearly 24% of US citizens have an arrest or conviction record.⁹ An arrest record alone can result in a vast number of collateral consequences that prevent the individual from basic things like securing licenses and credentials, employment, housing, and education.¹⁰ The more than 44,000 state and federal legal collateral consequences faced by those with arrest & conviction records prevent them from doing *the exact things* that we in the larger society say we want them to do, behave in a - manner, to provide for themselves and their families through -high-quality living-wage work.¹¹

- **High-Quality Living-Wage Work** is pro-social vs. anti-social. It improves self-esteem and is a positive use of time. It also enables the person to become self-sufficient and not dependent on others including the government for sustenance.¹²
- **High-Quality Living-Wage Work** through reentry is critical to the success of the nation's economy. People with Arrest & Conviction records are one of the largest untapped pools of labor available to US businesses.¹³ The current demand for qualified workers is high, and according to the National Federation of Independent Business, many unemployed individuals do not meet the qualifications for industries that are hiring. Fifty-five percent of business owners reported hiring or trying to hire. Eighty-nine percent of those hiring or trying to hire reported few or no qualified applicants for available positions. Thirty-three percent of small business owners have openings for skilled workers. People with records have demonstrated that they are a competent and extremely grateful/loyal workforce to business.¹⁴
- **High-Quality Living-Wage Work** through reentry reduces recidivism¹⁵ – recidivism reduction improves public safety. Recidivism reduction means no new crimes are being committed. It is measured by lower arrests, lower incarcerations, lower convictions, and lower incarcerations. Lower recidivism means fewer victims and safer communities.
- **High-Quality Living-Wage Work** -in the form of workforce development – is a top priority for the states. In 2023, the National Association for State Workforce Agencies' top legislative priorities included maintaining investment for WIOA-funded statewide programs and increasing permanent funding for job training and apprentice programs. In 2024, the National Governors Association identified workforce issues as a priority.
- **High-Quality Living-Wage Work** reduces recidivism and that lowers the tax burden on US citizens.¹⁶ The state of Illinois has estimated that the cost of each recidivism event is more than \$150,000 (policing, detention, legal costs, victimization costs, and a year of prison. These are costs borne by the taxpayers.¹⁷

An example of a proven successful employment program is Safer Foundation's Adult Transition Work Release Centers. The Safer Foundation ATCs have been an effective "best practice" feature of Illinois' correctional system for over 40 years and an integral part of the State's long-term strategy to improve its corrections outcomes. Safer's ATCs provide a robust array of services to individuals in the custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections, including job readiness training, GED preparation, substance use disorder treatment, vocational training for industry-specific credentials, family reunification, parenting skills, and other vital cost-effective reentry services. The purpose of the centers is to give individuals the necessary tools to successfully transition back into the community and to obtain employment before being released. In FY23, 86% of eligible clients at Crossroads ATC and North Lawndale ATC were employed. Of them, 83%, maintained 30-day retention.

Residents and ATC graduates actively contribute to the economy by filling positions that generate revenue and profits for Illinois businesses. While finishing their last 1-2 years of a state prison sentence, they pay income taxes, pay fees, and fines, and provide dependent support payments. They also purchase products and services in the community which supports local businesses. In FY 23 Safer's Adult Transition Center residents, while in custody, earned more than \$5.9 million in gross wages. By remaining in prison, these same individuals would contribute zero dollars to their families and our economy. They would be a burden to taxpayers who pay nearly \$44,704 for each incarcerated individual, with limited rehabilitative support to help change behavior.¹⁸ Upon release, our ATC residents have average savings exceeding \$4000.00 per person. Data provided by the State of Illinois demonstrates that Safer ATC residents experience a 16.5% recidivism rate versus a 39% rate for individuals returning directly to communities from prisons.

CONCLUSION

In FY24, Safer expects to provide services to nearly 5000 people with arrest and conviction records. At Safer Foundation, we develop high-impact workforce development models and cost-effective solutions that meet the unique re-entry needs of our clients.

Things Congress Can Do

- We urge Congress to fund \$135 million for the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) Program at the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration which provides workforce development and reentry services to people with criminal legal histories while helping employers identify trained and credentialed employees to hire for open positions.
- We urge Congress to fund \$125 million for the Second Chance Act Program at the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance to provide reentry services and support nationwide.
- Funding comprehensive workforce development that includes wrap-around services helps our clients to stabilize their lives and makes it feasible for them to succeed in training and maintain employment. Individuals cannot succeed in work if they are hungry, homeless, or have no access to transportation and medication to stabilize their lives.
- Finally, we urge Congress to reduce the tens of thousands of legal collateral consequences that create barriers for people with criminal legal records to secure employment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify when we make nominal investments in people's efforts to secure private-sector employment through reentry, the beneficiaries include all of us – Taxpayers, Government, Families, and Communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

¹ *Toolkit Criminal Records and Reentry Toolkit (2023) National Conference of State Legislatures*. Available at: <https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/criminal-records-and-reentry-toolkit>

² LaBriola, Joe. "Post-Prison Employment Quality and Future Criminal Justice Contact." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 154–72. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2020.6.1.07>.

³ Cerullo, Megan (2019) *JPMorgan Chase hired more than 2,000 ex-convicts last year*. Available at:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jpmorgan-chase-hiring-people-with-criminal-records-through-second-chance-hiring-program/>

⁴ "The Cost of Recidivism." CSG Justice Center, Council of State Governments Justice Center, csjusticecenter.org/publications/the-cost-of-recidivism/.

⁵ Durose, Matthew R., Cooper, Alexia D., Snyder, Howard N. "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010," Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 2014. Available at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf>

⁶ Brennan Center for Justice. "Conviction, Imprisonment, and Lost Earnings: How Involvement with the Criminal Justice System Deepens Inequality." Brennan Center for Justice, www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/conviction-imprisonment-and-lost-earnings-how-involvement-criminal and Kearney, Melissa S. "The Economic Challenges of Crime & Incarceration in the United States." Brookings, 22 Dec. 2014, www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-economic-challenges-of-crime-incarceration-in-the-united-states/.

⁷ Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024." Prison Policy Initiative, 24 Mar. 2024, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html.

⁸ Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024." Prison Policy Initiative, 24 Mar. 2024, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html.

⁹ Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024." Prison Policy Initiative, 24 Mar. 2024, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html.

¹⁰ Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council 2024 Data, Costs, and Baseline Projection for Impact Reports,

<https://spac.illinois.gov/publications/fiscal-impact-analysis>

¹¹ Jennifer Bronson & E. Ann Carson. Prisoners in 2017, Bureau of Justice Statistics (April 2019),

<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p17.pdf>, Justice Center, National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction, Council of State Government Justice Center (2019), <https://niccc.csjusticecenter.org/>.

¹² Cullen, Francis T., et al. "The End of Mass Incarceration: Opportunities for Reform." *Beyond Bars: A Path Forward from 50 Years of Mass Incarceration in the United States*, edited by Kristen M. Budd et al., 1st ed., Bristol University Press, 2023, pp. 95–105.

¹³ Second Chance Business Coalition." Second Chance Business Coalition, secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/, <https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/>

¹⁴ Why It Matters." Second Chance Business Coalition, secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/why-it-matters, <https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/why-it-matters>.

¹⁵ Davis, Lois M., et al. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults." RAND Corporation, 22 Aug. 2013. www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.

¹⁶ The Price We Pay: Economic Costs of Barriers to Employment for Former Prisoners and People Convicted of Felonies." Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 2016, cepr.net/report/the-price-we-pay-economic-costs-of-barriers-to-employment-for-former-prisoners-and-people-convicted-of-felonies/.

¹⁷ The Cost of Recidivism." CSG Justice Center, Council of State Governments Justice Center, csjusticecenter.org/publications/the-cost-of-recidivism/.

¹⁸ The true per capita cost for housing one inmate for one year, including all benefits and pension costs is \$44,704." In "Prison Resource Consumption by Offense Class." Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, April 6, 2018. Available at http://www.wicjia.state.il.us/spac/pdf/SPAC_Prison_Resource_infographic_2019.pdf.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Ms. Williams. I want to thank all of our witnesses for your valuable and substantive testimony here today. We are now going to move to our question-and-answer period from the Members of Congress. We will begin with Chairman Smith.

Chairman SMITH. Thank you. I thank each and every one of you for your testimony.

Mr. Caldwell, your story is one of victory over adversity. Your experience surely has taught you valuable lessons about what does help individuals escape poverty, including the value of work and the positive ripple effects it can have in our communities.

That being said, could you share some insight into what policies, in your view, create a direct impediment in lifting more Americans out of poverty?

Mr. CALDWELL. Yes, there is a number of things that I think that block that. And I have got to tell you, with the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which I thought was incredibly important because it did allow for individuals—like myself, for example, I worked for the Social Security Administration. I only could get that part-time job based on experience and the fact that I was receiving—when my family was receiving benefits at the time. That was a gate that opened wide open for many, many Americans, I think.

Now, the truth of the matter is, for those who want to reform the system, which is a good thing, those who want to say if you earn, you know, a particular dollar amount, we are going to pull the rug from under you and we are going to ensure that the door closes right behind you, I think that is where the problem comes for a lot of folks in communities like the South Side of Chicago. They want to certainly know that there is certainty in the fact that they can go out and work and earn as much as they possibly can, and then gradually come off the system. And I think that, in and of itself, is an opportunity for those who may be a little fearful of going out there. That gives them a bit of peace to try to get that dignity of work and lift out of poverty.

Chairman SMITH. I noticed that when you were giving your testimony, you had, it looked like, maybe not hit all the points that you want. Is there anything additional that you would like to share?

Mr. CALDWELL. No. You know, I think for many of us it has become the boogeyman that you say someone has to work to earn benefits or, rather, to be able to have benefits. I think that is a boogeyman. I think it is wrong.

I think, for a lot of individuals, they want to work. The people in the communities that I grew up in, they wanted to work. They didn't know the processes in some ways, and then some others just would rather stay at home. But when you stay home, things like depression happen. You have domestic abuse that could happen. And then there is criminality that can come right after, nefarious activities to try to earn money and continue to receive your welfare at the same time. And I think those are some of the issues that need to be closely looked at.

Chairman SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. Montgomery, I appreciate the unique approach that your organization takes in providing the assistance through real-world ex-

periences that empower individuals and demonstrate the importance of work and independence. Based on your experience and the transformation you have seen in those you have assisted, how might state and Federal-level welfare programs do more to provide that sense of empowerment to folks?

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Yes, thank you. Good question. Thank you, Chairman Smith.

You know, I think that one thing that I have heard mentioned is the benefit cliff. Certainly, I think that is a huge obstacle for a lot of folks in trying to move forward. I don't know how many different people I have spoken with who reached that point of decision where, okay, now if I am going to move forward, my benefits are going to be cut, but the wages I am going to earn are not going to make up the difference. So now I can either choose to retreat or I can choose to persevere.

And the reality of it is, especially when you have grown up in a generational cycle of poverty, where all you have known and been conditioned to is the idea of standing in line, the ability to see down the road is almost impossible. And so I think that certainly is a huge part of really being able to implement programs that work with folks, because at the end of the day the people have to have the autonomy and capacity to make those decisions to really move forward as a part of that.

That is—the bottom line for us is we acknowledge that all of us are broken, and we want to walk alongside one another as we all grow into who it is we have been created to be. But we have to create space and opportunity for that to happen over time.

Chairman SMITH. Thank you. Thank you all for being here.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Smith. We will now yield to Mr. Davis for his questions.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to all of the witnesses.

I certainly would agree that work is one of the best programs that could exist to reduce poverty. As a matter of fact, I am reminded that in "The Prophet," Gibran said that when you work, it is love made visible; that when you work, it binds you to your dreams, hopes, and aspirations.

Vice President Williams, let me thank you for spending time with us. And I know that Safer has refined its programs over time, and that often times you have had to adjust and readjust. Can you talk a bit about what supports you have found necessary to help your clients overcome barriers to long-term work, productive work that they enjoy and can feel good about?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Ranking Member Davis.

We have been—and our mission remains the same when it comes to providing work for the individuals we serve. But over time we realized that people want to work, but they have so many barriers in between them and that job. And they could be collateral consequences, so statutory, legal barriers that stand before them—and I have to tell you, I have done a lot of work in advocacy, and it is like ripping off layers to an onion in terms of how many barriers exist in front of them.

But also it is the supports they need from—they need wrap-around services. So over time we have had to become a wraparound

holistic service shop, a one-stop-shop because they need housing, they need transportation in order to get to work. They have to have education in order to have skills for certain training so that they can get that living-wage employment.

They—when they are stabilized, when they do receive housing, when they can go to a job, then they can start opening up about other issues that impact their life, including if they have any kind of substance use or mental health needs, behavioral health needs that we can treat.

And now, now we are at a point where we can start talking to them about their health, because we had to start to stabilize them to get to them to a point of thriving to talk about their health. And so I am very honored that now we have the opportunity to talk about how can we improve your health so that you can go to job—to your job, so that you can not only get it but maintain it?

Mr. DAVIS. I know that you have had great success in the health arena. Could you talk a little bit about how that came about and who you worked with?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, we worked with you, and many, many thanks that we could make that happen, because if it had not been for you to call the forum with health care employers, I don't know if we would have been able to do the work.

We had to have a formal—we invited health care employers, including FQHCs and hospital systems and all the chairmen and all the CEOs, and they came because of your help. And they gave us an audience to listen. We had Johns Hopkins Hospital come and talk about their program, hiring people with records, where they had been hiring people with records for over a decade and had very low turnover, high retention. And they had close to no levels of, like, violent incidents that happened when they hired people with records. The Chicago area employers heard it. And by the end of that pilot, we had health care employers knocking at our door: "We need to hire everybody. We need to hire, you know, we have front-line, we have nursing, we have all these positions available."

But what we found in that forum is that employers had this perception that they couldn't, per the law, hire people with records, and they didn't know how. So they had a whole process, background check policies that were outdated. They hadn't looked at the recent law. They didn't have them updated, they didn't know how to hire. And then there was the implicit bias that was attached as well, not for the executive leadership that came to the forum, but from their hiring managers who, if they were informed that a person had a record, they would not hire that person.

So we had to navigate through all of those barriers, and we had to change the law, as well. We led occupational licensing reform. I see Matt from the Illinois Policy Institute there. We worked with the Illinois Policy Institute, and we created a bipartisan coalition to pass occupational licensing reform. The health care work is the reason why we did that, because we knew if we wanted people to get into health care, we had to knock down those barriers and ensure that it was a fair process for them to have a fair chance.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Davis. I will now recognize myself for a number of questions.

I first want to just point out today we have about seven million unfilled jobs in the country. And everywhere that I travel in my district—and I think probably my colleagues feel the same way—it is finding qualified workers: truck drivers, nurses, mechanics, machinists. Throughout our society we are looking for a qualified workforce. And there is, again, no better topic than we are talking about today in transitioning people into the workforce to get a number of these good-paying jobs through apprenticeships, skills training, and workforce development.

Mr. Paprocki, I want to start with you. We have heard a lot today about the bipartisan nature of going back to 1996, when Speaker Newt Gingrich and President Clinton worked together on bipartisan welfare reform and the benefits. As a result of those reforms, under TANF, the Temporary Assistance of Needy Families, caseloads dropped by 80 percent between 1994 and 2023. Over time, these successes, though, have been chipped away by policies at the state level that cut or eliminate work requirements under the guise of compassion. While characterizing these efforts to link welfare benefits, some people have called that mean or unfair.

I am wondering if you could comment on linking welfare benefits to the expectation of work as being mean or unfair in some way. And instead of reducing these requirements, do you think it would be good to expand them to other Federal means-tested programs?

Mr. PAPROCKI. You know what I think is mean? How we treat poor people in this country. We treat them like they are liabilities and they are not assets, right?

They are raising their hand and they are saying, “I want help,” right? But instead we go give them a little bit of money on a plastic card, and we tell them to go away. That is mean. Right?

We tell them that their jobs don’t have purpose, that just because it is low-wage, meaning it is low-value, and we whisper these little lies inside of it as if dignity is commensurate with pay. It is not, right? Jobs have value. Humans have value. Poor people have value, and they are some of the greatest assets we have in this country.

I think a great example of this is this woman, Claudia Perez. She is over in the Pilsen neighborhood. And every morning she gets up and she sells tamales to her neighbors in her community. But pushing a food cart was illegal in the City of Chicago. So government officials came by, they took her food cart, they dumped out all of her food. They stomped it on the ground, and they said, “This is garbage.” Right? To me, that is mean.

And I think we need to restore this idea of all work has dignity, and we need to promote this, and we need to shift the framework that we have on poor people in this country. Instead of treating them like liabilities, we should have work requirements. We should say, “We know what value that you can provide for this country because we believe in you,” and we should expand more of that and allow more people to see that dignity in their work.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you.

Mr. Butler, thank you for your testimony. Thank you for being here, and thanks for sharing your story of success and how you

achieved that. You talked about the Pathway organization on the success you have had, building the capacity and the skill sets for your residents through work so that they can earn higher wages. Can you talk about the specific partnerships that you have in Peoria, specifically with Illinois Central College and the workforce and certificate programs that they offer?

Mr. BUTLER. Yes, sure. So we partner with Illinois Central College, and we have—first I would like to just say that the folks coming through our door need a moment to breathe and to become stable. I am sure with Pacific Garden Mission and Dream Center and everywhere else in our community, folks come in and they need a moment to breathe, to be stabilized, and to get ready.

So we use an asset-based approach at Pathway Ministries when folks come into our doors. What is it that they want to do? And when they have expressed interest to further their education, to further job readiness training, to get out of this cycle of poverty, not to get my SSI check because I can make way more—which is a mindset that just blows me away, that people come in for \$735 a month and don't want a job making \$2,000 a month, they are afraid to lose that check, it is an anomaly, it is awful to deal with.

But we partner with ICC. Our folks are able to get funded through ICC. That is free to them to go to school. They actually will earn a stipend to go to school and learn that trade. It has been absolutely awesome throughout our community, as well.

Our Pathway Works enterprise programs, we also pay folks a stipend as they stay in the shelter or they are in our renewal programs to learn those soft skills, what employers are looking for: being dependable, coming to work with a good attitude, how to have conflict resolution so that they can further their lives outside of Pathway Ministries.

Homelessness is typically just a symptom of the real problem. And when we address homelessness as an individual, rather than this great big problem, we can have more success at solving the problem when we do it on an individual level.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you for that.

Ms. Schofield, I am going to ask you the same question. I also want to just acknowledge you sharing your story and the struggles you have gone through, and what you have been able to do to better your life, thank you for sharing that here today. Can you talk a little bit about the Dream Center and the similar partnerships you have with workforce agencies and the community college?

Ms. SCHOFIELD. We would not be able to do what we do with people without the great partnerships in our community. We are partnered with Illinois Central College on the same types of programs as Pathway's. We are partnered with education with several trade schools, the apprenticeship program through the electrical. That is what it is, it is the apprenticeship program. All those programs we partner with because we found that so few people actually want to go back and get a degree; they wanted to get something that they could start working right now. And these programs would offer stipends while they were training so they could afford to live and be a part of the program and learn a new trade.

And these people have been very, very successful, and so it has been a great program for us.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you for that. We will next recognize Mr. Smucker of Pennsylvania for his questions.

Mr. SMUCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate each of you being here to share your stories and share the way you are meeting the needs in your communities. It is really inspiring.

And I appreciate the opportunity for us, on a bipartisan basis, to be discussing these. And I think this is most helpful when we look together at what is working and what is not, and do not have the partisan bickering that I think is not helpful, not helpful at all.

I want to start with reconciling a few statements that were made today. And I have got a great deal of respect for Ranking Member Davis, but I am going to pick out just one statement he made. He said he strongly disagrees with those who blame people for their poverty. He strongly disagrees with those who blame people for their poverty.

Mr. Montgomery, you said people rise or fall to the level of expectations you have of them. And Ms. Schofield, you said a common thread in so many cases is the lack of self-esteem or belief. And I would like to ask—maybe we will start with Mr. Montgomery—how do you reconcile the idea—we know individuals you are serving have things stacked against them. They may not have the family support that is needed. They may have generational poverty. They may not know how—Mr. Caldwell, you said, to get off of government assistance, how to enter the workforce. They may have been incarcerated. There may be drugs. There are a lot of things. They may have a poor education system. There are a lot of things stacked against them.

But yet we have to expect that they somehow rise to the level of accepting responsibility for their own path forward. And so I think, you know, saying we strongly disagree with those who blame people for their poverty may not fully capture how we need to think about this.

I heard another member of the Ways and Means Committee at one of our hearings say a statement that shocked me, and that was that we were holding that hearing that day to dispel the notion—she was glad we were holding the hearing, because it dispelled the notion that many members had that work ethic has anything to do with success or failure. And so—and this was a teacher who talked about the classroom, where students were coming with very—you know, things stacked against them. But I just thought what a sad thing, to think that we would be telling people that you can't pull yourself up because of the condition you are in.

So Mr. Montgomery, how do you balance that? How do you get to the point that Mr. Caldwell was talking about, where you can change your own life?

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Sure. Yes, sir. Thank you for the question.

Certainly, poverty is complex, right? We know that there are systems at play. We know that there are choices at play. In my experience, everyone's situation and position in life boils down to two things: opportunity and choices.

The opportunity often—systems are involved in that: where I am born, the color of my skin, the type of education I am afforded, the opportunities that are in front of me. Right? Everyone, it is different.

With that we all have choices to make. You know, in my experience, certainly, the less opportunity you have, the less margin you have to make bad choices for sure, no doubt. But it does not remove the personal responsibility of making choices.

And so I think that the idea that it is somehow punitive and otherwise blaming the individuals, it is a matter of perspective. I think that was something we encountered when we first changed our model. There were folks who looked at what we were doing—and quite frankly, a few referred to it as the Republican model, which is somewhat fitting today, given the conversation. But the reality was we were not changing how we were doing what we were doing in order to punish or blame those individuals. We were changing our model because we believed in them. We believed in their capacity. We believed that they had something more to offer than what they were experiencing in this poverty situation that they were dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

And I think it is important how we look at it. Certainly, you can approach it from a punitive perspective and how you basically administer or implement those sorts of things. But for us, that is not how we look at it at all.

Mr. SMUCKER. We need, as a society, their energy, their work.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. A hundred and ten percent. We talk about that every day, that we are co-laborers. And what that means is that I have as much to gain from you as you do from me in this relationship as we work alongside one another.

Mr. SMUCKER. One of the things that strikes me—and I only have a few seconds here—is that most of your programs, you are doing it without any government assistance. And in fact, Mr. Caldwell said the government programs we have perhaps make it worse.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Yes.

Mr. SMUCKER. Which is amazing to hear.

But one thing we can all agree on, I think everyone here and everyone there, is the value of work. So perhaps we ought to be thinking about our government programs and investing more in that career and technical training.

There is a program called WIOA. I have a bill that would reenergize that program, incentivize employees [sic] to help individuals get to the workforce. Also, we could potentially be providing a tax credit to employers who invest in apprenticeship programs, who invest in career and technical training, having those kind of connections because, as Chairman LaHood said, millions of jobs available, yet millions of people not participating in the workforce. And I think we ought to be focusing our efforts on how we can better connect those two facts of life that we have here today.

So this was very, very helpful. Sorry I am a little bit over time here, Mr. Chairman, but thank you.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Smucker. I now recognize Ms. Moore of Wisconsin.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Ranking Member. I want to thank all of our witnesses for very profound, insightful testimony.

I really appreciate my colleagues for being so candid about their beliefs. And so I may as well be candid, as well. I do think that

when we start talking about blaming people for their poverty, I kind of agree with you, Mr. Montgomery. People have opportunity and choices, as well. And I thought that was very profound, the way you put it.

But I would say that there are economic schemes that maximize profit over people, and that that is what traps people into low-wage work. So when we start hearing about Ms. Williams and the type of opportunity she is talking about, and the kind of opportunities that my colleagues here often talk about, you often want to talk about forcing people to go to work, saying that, you know, you can't eat dignity, you can't pay your rent with dignity. You need money. You need enough money. And I would think that these low-wage jobs create problems.

I agree with you, Mr. Paprocki, that benefit cliffs really continue to keep people subjected to these low-wage jobs, forces them to remain in them if they want to continue to get Medicaid and other kinds of support. Welfare deliberately limits the education and training that you can get so that you can never get out of poverty. And of course, poor health is a major barrier, and mental health.

And domestic violence, Ms. Schofield, is a huge risk factor for being poor.

Mr. Paprocki, you didn't mention what your level of education was at the time your mother was sick, and whether or not you had any children. Would you share that with the committee?

Mr. PAPROCKI. I did not have children. I had a bachelor's degree.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. And you have a bachelor's degree. So you didn't have a lot of barriers. You went to get yourself together when your mother died. I mean, you were a good White man in America with no kids. You didn't need childcare. Thank you for that.

Mr. PAPROCKI. Well, I did—

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. You had a bachelor's degree. I don't have much time.

Mr. Montgomery, I am so happy that you are engaged in finding the root causes of poverty, that you are more data-driven, and you have really demonstrated it by your amazing testimony here today.

Mr. Butler, you are a sermon in shoes. I thought you were going to pass the collection plate there for a minute. You are a role model. I really love your analysis about building the kinds of spiritual and human and cultural relationships. And again, Ms. Schofield, really, your happily ever after wasn't. But it turned out happily ever after anyway for you. Domestic violence is a real risk factor for women. You have a baby, and you think things are going to work out, and when they don't it is the woman who becomes the welfare queen and the problem, and not the man. I appreciate your testimony.

Mr. Caldwell, I hope you go and kiss your grandmother 20 times on her feet everywhere for raising you. Any assistance that she got from anybody, she deserved it, and it looks like you turned out pretty good.

Ms. Williams, I do have a number of questions for you. You talk a lot about the quality of jobs that people get as delivering them from poverty. And not just this notion, you know, some of these

oxymorons that we hear. Let me just—a couple of them I think I kind of wrote down. Yes, giving people assistance locks people in poverty.

I mean, you know, that is an oxymoron. You are helping somebody, and that is what locks them into poverty. I just want you to comment a little bit on particular one program that the ranking member didn't mention, the Health Profession and Opportunity Grant, which the Republicans on this committee refused to reauthorize, which would have provided—I still got time, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman LAHOOD. No, no, it wasn't me.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Oh, okay. Reclaiming my time, they, you know, they refused to renew it.

But given the fact that there is 65,000 people turning 65 every single day, wouldn't it have been helpful to develop stackable kinds of credentials with people in the health care industry, considering that all of these people here, except for me, are getting old every day?

I would yield to you for your answer.

Ms. WILLIAMS. I will say that it would not only benefit the individuals that would participate in the credentialing and program, it would help the employers that desperately need the workers.

Poor people don't just want to be stable, they want to thrive like everyone else. So that means that we have to provide living-wage employment and credentialing opportunities to get them trained for the skills that they need. Healthy people equals healthy communities, and everyone will benefit from that.

So I just wanted to say when we—you know, I want to thank the members of this subcommittee and Ranking Member Davis for supporting programs like RIO and Second Chance Program, because I would say that they have done an immense service to our participants to get them out of poverty.

When we look at Medicaid, when we look at insurance, when we look at food benefits, that is crisis stabilization, that is getting them on a footing so we can even talk about a job. Because if we can't get those things, if we can't get them into housing if there is a need because there is domestic violence, then we can't talk to them about work. We can't talk to them about training because they are worried about how they are going to eat, they are worried about how they are going to live. So we have to address those things first before we can even talk about a job, before we can even—and we have to talk about transportation. That is one thing I haven't heard anybody talk about. How are they going to get to the job?

We have situations where we are, like, we have a job, but people are like, it is so expensive on your bus card to get to the job. So it is like by the time they get done with their transportation costs, it is not even worth getting to the job because it is too expensive. So we need employers that are near the individual.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Mr. Chairman, I yield back, and thank you for your indulgence.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you. I am going to next recognize Mr. Carey. Before I do that, I do want—Mr. Paprocki, you were asked a question. If you could, just respond quickly.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Mr. Chairman, was that my time? Well, that is one reason why I was really happy about your indulgence because, you know, when your point of view is on the table, then the clock doesn't even move. And so he responded to my question adequate to my satisfaction. He answered it.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Ms. Moore.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. And the witnesses have had time to give their testimony. Thank you.

And of course, you are the chairman, so you can have as much time as you might consume.

Chairman LAHOOD. Yes.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Until our planes leave. [Laughter.]

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Ms. Moore, for that.

Mr. Paprocki, if you could, respond quickly.

Mr. PAPROCKI. Well, Ms. Moore, first let me say, as a young man—

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Do I get a chance to respond to whatever he is saying?

Chairman LAHOOD. So we are going to let Mr. Paprocki respond.

Go ahead.

Mr. PAPROCKI. Who is from Wisconsin. Thank you for your service. I am grateful for that.

You know, it was a struggle. The truth is I didn't make any money for eight months. When I came home here to Chicago, my power had been cut off because I couldn't pay my electricity bill. I opened the door, I tried to turn on the light, it didn't flip. And I smelled the rotting food that was coming out of my refrigerator. So I understand what it is like not to have food. I went to go try to ride on the bus. I didn't have \$2 to go take a train ride in the City of Chicago. And I sat there and I begged, right? And I begged for money, and I begged for help to try to get that step.

My point is not to say that the struggle doesn't exist. I fully understand it, and I have lived part of that struggle. But what I have also seen, not only through the data but through life experience, is that work can pull people up, and it can. We can tell individuals that what you do matters, and that is intrinsically what is happening in work. It is a conversation. It is saying, I need you, right?

Right now you are sitting here in front of me because we need you, right? And that is what I want to tell more of the people in our society is that your work matters. It has value, and we need you. Thank you.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Their work matters, but they need enough money. And it looks like—I just repeat what I said. You didn't have any barriers. You didn't have children to take care of. You didn't need daycare. You are a White man in America. You are articulate beyond comparison to 90 percent of the population.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Ms. Moore.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. And I congratulate you for pulling yourself out of that situation under those circumstances, and I yield back.

Chairman LAHOOD. We will now recognize Mr. Carey of Ohio.

Mr. CAREY. I want to thank the chairman. I also want to thank the Ranking Member Davis, and I want to thank all of you for being here today.

I had an opportunity to look at all of your bios because the flight from Washington, D.C. to here took less time than the cab ride from O'Hare to here. [Laughter.]

Mr. CAREY. So I was able to read most of your testimony.

And Matthew, because I cannot read your name from here, but I am going to call you Matt, Matthew, you know, both you and Ms. Williams laid out some very, very—you laid out three things. And I always ask any person that comes into my office, "Give me the three things that we can do in Congress." So, Matthew, I am going to start with you. Ms. Williams, I am going to go to you next.

Expand upon those three things. Keep it within 40 seconds, if you can, because I only have 4 minutes. Matthew, you are up.

Mr. PAPROCKI. For the first, we have talked about benefits cliffs. And the problems of incentives is that for a lot of Americans they have to decide, should I take this promotion? And we hear this all the time.

I have a woman, Ahey, who works at i.c.stars. She said, "I have a lot of friends I know from back when I was poor. They won't go for bigger jobs."

Mr. CAREY. That is right.

Mr. PAPROCKI. They purposely go for minimum wage jobs because Section 8 is on the line, food stamps are on the line, and insurance are on the line. We need to fix that.

Mr. CAREY. Okay, go to the next.

Mr. PAPROCKI. The second one is about expanding apprenticeship opportunities.

Mr. CAREY. Absolutely.

Mr. PAPROCKI. Look, there is a great way to lift people up. This same woman, Ahey, learned coding from one of our friends, i.c.stars. Her first job was \$56,000 a year. She immediately got promoted to \$87,000 in a year. Now she is an entrepreneur making more money than that. She was homeless with three children, and she was able to pull herself out.

Mr. CAREY. And to that, you have my colleague from the other side of the aisle, Nikki Budzinski, who is here in Illinois, a dear friend of mine, we have co-introduced the LEAP Act together, which is an apprenticeship program. So if you haven't taken a look at it, please do. I think it is a good bipartisan measure that can move forward. Go to your number three.

Mr. PAPROCKI. The third is work requirements, similar to what we saw in the year 1996. That was just for TANF.

Mr. CAREY. Yes.

Mr. PAPROCKI. I think there is a huge opportunity for this committee to expand it beyond that.

I do want to say a quick quote from a Senator.

Mr. CAREY. Make it quick.

Mr. PAPROCKI. It said the culture of welfare must be replaced—

Mr. CAREY. I need Ms. Williams.

Mr. PAPROCKI [continuing]. By the culture of work. The culture of dependance must be replaced by a culture of self-sufficiency.

Mr. CAREY. Okay.

Mr. PAPROCKI. That came from our current President, Joe Biden.

Mr. CAREY. Okay, good deal. All right, Ms. Williams, give me those three things real quick. I wrote them down quickly. I really like the 40—you just go, okay. Give me give me 1, 2, 3, give it in 40 seconds, please.

Ms. WILLIAMS. All right. Thank you so much.

I would say first continue to support grants or opportunities like the Health Opportunity Grant.

Mr. CAREY. And tell me why.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Because we serve all industries, right?

Mr. CAREY. Yes.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Or a lot of them. Health care was one of the top-performing, where the retention numbers were very high because when people have a real opportunity as a frontline position, there is an opportunity for growth to be promoted within the institution in the hospitals. They have massive problems with frontline—

Mr. CAREY. Got you, got you, yes, absolutely.

Ms. WILLIAMS. So they want to promote people.

Mr. CAREY. Okay, go to number two.

Ms. WILLIAMS. But also RIO, as well as Second Chance Act, because we are seeing the same kind of results in those industries, as well.

I would say the second thing is legislation for collateral consequences. I mentioned before how we work with Illinois Policy Institute—

Mr. CAREY. Yes.

Ms. WILLIAMS [continuing]. In a bipartisan coalition within the house and the senate in Illinois, because everyone understood all these statutory barriers that are, in fact—that make no sense. It is the industries that were pushing them just to exclude, you know, have exclusive markets.

Mr. CAREY. Okay.

Ms. WILLIAMS. But the person, you know, doesn't have an opportunity. There are real barriers just stopping people from going into living wage opportunities, where they can make a career, not a job.

Mr. CAREY. I got you.

Ms. WILLIAMS. The—

Mr. CAREY. Give me your last one.

Ms. WILLIAMS. And the third one is care coordination, support for care coordination services.

Mr. CAREY. Tell me about that real quick.

Ms. WILLIAMS. So—

Mr. CAREY. Give me about 20 seconds, okay?

Ms. WILLIAMS. People want to work, but they have problems navigating all the various systems. And the systems, none of them, are speaking to each other. The training, the job, the workforce development, housing, health care, behavioral health, none of the systems are talking to each other, none of the correctional systems in terms of Illinois Department of Corrections or any other state agen-

cies, no one is kind of doing this care coordination, where you have one person who is doing the navigation for a person—

Mr. CAREY. Got you. So it is a coordination issue, and I appreciate that.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Bringing all the resources together to get the best return on investment.

Mr. CAREY. And I would encourage my colleagues, since we are all going to take that two-hour drive to the airport today, to read through your testimony. It was very insightful.

Mr. Caldwell, I am not sure everything that you are doing right now, but when you do decide to run for office, and I don't care what side of the aisle it is, I will be knocking on doors for you.

Mr. CALDWELL. All right. Thank you so much.

Mr. CAREY. Ms. Schofield, I will tell you, this story about you living in the car, inspirational. Really happy. Where are your children today? You have got, like, three seconds. I am sorry. [Laughter.]

Ms. SCHOFIELD. My son works at the Dream Center. My daughter works for OSF.

Mr. CAREY. I am sure you are very proud.

Ms. SCHOFIELD. I am.

Mr. CAREY. I want to thank you all. I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member. And again, thank you all for coming out today. Thanks so much.

I yield back.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Carey. I now recognize Mr. HERN of Oklahoma.

Mr. HERN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the witnesses for your testimony today and this meeting today.

This hearing is the very reason I am in Congress today. I spent 35 years creating jobs from entry level to executive level for across all kinds of businesses, quite frankly, 35 years as a McDonald's franchisee, as a person who went through career tech, vo tech when I was in high school. But more importantly, it is the foundation, the journey of life.

A person who grew up in extraordinary poverty—my stepdad was the first-generation welfare recipient, he figured out how to work the system. My mother had been married to an Air Force guy, my dad, and they got divorced after he went to Vietnam for the third time, and she ended up having three more kids with the two that she had, my brother and I, with my dad. But he figured out how to go get checks from the mailbox. And every program out there you can think of, I have looked at these, I have seen them.

I can tell you that the only reason I am at where I am at today is not the welfare, it kept our lights on. We had no running water, no indoor plumbing until I was in the eighth grade. And I can tell you right now the thing that is really nice about America is we try to take care of our people because when you don't care about your people, you don't care as a nation.

And, you know, it is sad that this issue in America is partisan at all. It should be bipartisan. We should all agree that every person should deserve a job and the opportunity to work. I am not politicizing this. This is a fact.

But I can also tell you, Ms. Schofield and Ms. Williams, it is different for a mom with a child than it is a single guy that can just go. And I saw this because my mother found out that her husband, my stepdad, had three other kids per three other wives, nine other kids, and he had figured out how to get all kinds of checks. So he figured out the system. And his parents were hardworking individuals. I can still remember my mother telling me to go take stuff back because food stamps wouldn't pay for it. I was the oldest of five kids.

So I promised myself when I went to Congress, when I ran for office, never ran for anything else before, that I was going to go work to do my best to protect the opportunities that gave a guy like me that came from absolutely nothing to succeed in life. And I will never take that back.

Nobody can ever—you can be critical all you want to from a political standpoint, but you just don't know. And every one of you out there have a story, and you have been telling your story, and it is very important.

But as we look, as we go forward here, we have got to figure out the programs that really work. What Congress is really good about is stacking programs on programs without ever understanding whether they work or not. Last year, when I was on this subcommittee—I am not on the subcommittee any more, but it is a passion of mine. That is why I am here. Today is my 30th anniversary, and I am here because this is really important to me. And I can tell you right now that we have almost 90 programs that we pay out over \$1 trillion a year. The last number I saw was 1.2 trillion a year of federally-supported programs. And the Government Accountability Office can't tell us which programs really work or not.

So we are up here talking about adding other programs. What we should do is our Accountability Office should tell us what is working and what is not, and we should redeploy those dollars, not new dollars, but those dollars to programs that actually work, modernize our assistance today because we should be helping those who had a bad spot in life. We are blessed to be the wealthiest nation in the world. We need to act like that. We need to make sure our people rise out of poverty.

And yes, there is a narrative out there that the least of us is better than the, you know, the best of the rest of the world. So what? So what? The reason we do what we do and we go protect democracy around the world is so people can have the opportunities that we have in the United States of America.

So I just want to say I want to thank you again for each of you being here. I am not asking—I mean, you guys have done a phenomenal job.

But Ms. Schofield, I have got all kinds of questions here for everybody, but I really wanted to just go to you, because your story is pretty powerful. And I would like for you to tell us more about the Dream Center, about what you do for people that had the hardships you had. Because those are really where the hardships are, because there is really binary choices. You let your kids go somewhere else, which is really hard as a mom, or you figure out how to take care of them.

Ms. SCHOFIELD. We work very hard at the Dream Center at creating self-sustaining families. So we bring families in, and we spend a lot of time assessing them. You know, what do they want to do? Trade, school, you know, finding the best fit for that family.

A lot of time in homeless services, there is just a quick fix. Let's throw somebody in an apartment. We want to spend time with people to find out what will keep their family above water, what will—

Mr. HERN. Can I get the last two seconds, one second of my time to say to all of you all, I think that you all would agree, and you have all said this, and I think everybody on this panel hopefully would agree, is we have got to solve this issue, the benefits cliff, once and for all across all of these programs so that people have the ability to work themselves out of this support. That is the only way it is going to work. Because at the end of the day, people are smart. If I can make more money not working and provide more for my family not working, why wouldn't I do that?

And shame on us, as the United States Congress, for allowing that to happen. That is what we need to be working.

I yield back.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Hern. Thanks for spending your 30th anniversary with us. Happy anniversary.

With that I recognize Mr. Panetta of California.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you. You better be thanking his wife, not just him. [Laughter.]

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Davis. And, of course, thanks to the Pacific Garden Mission for hosting us.

And yes, thank you to all of our witnesses who are here today, and who are willing to share their personal and professional background and what they hope for the future. So thanks to all of you.

Again, I am Jimmy Panetta. I represent the 19th congressional district out in California. It is not Chicago, it is not Milwaukee, it is not Oklahoma. It is the coast of California, okay? My district stretches from South San Jose, Santa Cruz, Monterey, Big Sur, all the way down to northern San Luis Obispo. Very proud of that district, exactly.

Now, it is diverse. As dynamic as it is, it is still pretty diverse, especially with these communities of interest. But I can tell you, the one thing that really brings my district together is affordability, or the lack of affordability and the lack of affordable housing, the cost of owning, the cost of renting, the cost of living. And yes, that does lead to homelessness. Clearly, we are seeing that from Silicon Valley to the wine country of northern San Luis Obispo. That is the number-one issue.

Now, some of the things that we are doing to address that, especially in South San Jose, is sort of the—one project, a couple of them that are around South San Jose because, like I said, like you can imagine, South San Jose does have the resources to create these types of things that the Federal Government is helping them out with, as well, are these emergency interim housing sites, places where individuals can get their own room, their own bathroom, which can lead to privacy, safety, and ultimately, dignity. And ulti-

mately, stability upon which they can have the training necessary to not just get off the street, but to get back on their feet.

And so I would like to ask Ms. Williams if, in her line of work, seeing this type of emergency housing, the sort of interim housing prior to permanent housing, prior to the training, what are the benefits of that?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you so much.

We have seen firsthand the importance of having emergency housing through the work we are doing with the support of Reentry Network Collaborative, we were actually asked by the state to step in during COVID-19 because people were getting released early, and they had nowhere to live, among all the other needs that they had.

And so in those situations we—I mean, I remember times when I was on the phone, and I had to stop at a gas station to try to use my credit card to get people into housing. We had a woman right during Christmas, when all the homeless shelters had shut down, she came in our office. She had a four-day-old child and her four-year-old, and she had nowhere to go. We couldn't get her into a shelter anywhere, and no one could live with that we—that she would be in her car. She was running from a domestic violence situation. She had actually went to a baby shower and started going into labor.

And so situations like that show you have to have emergency housing as part of your housing solution so that you can provide the temporary supports that will lead to permanent housing.

Mr. PANETTA. And kind of moving forward, how can that emergency interim housing lead to what we all want for people in that position, permanent housing?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, having that immediate solution will help stabilize that individual, right, so that they can make sure that they have what they need. Because we don't just provide that temporary housing, we also give them any kind of furnishings they need, we give them toiletries. In that case, for this young woman, we made sure she had formula for her child and any other services that she needed, but it got her in a mental state of mind where she was ready to hear us, right?

Because we—the way we work in terms of empowerment is we work down—we sit down with them, we ask them what their interests are and what their goals are. And together we work out a service plan, assessing their needs, and help come up with goals for them to achieve. And so housing, you have subsidized funding through the government, we are able to get them into housing, six months—and then it could be longer—which will help them. Our goal is to move them to private pay, but we have to subsidize it up front sometimes to help them get stable so that they can get the job so that they can then transition.

Mr. PANETTA. Okay, great. Look, I think in my time of leaning into—because I do think this is an all-hands-on-deck issue, especially when it comes to homelessness or the unhoused, whatever you want to call it, we all know the issue.

And I think what we can all acknowledge is that, yes, we understand work ethic. I am an Italian American. I came from a family of immigrants. I appreciate people who work hard and what that

provides them. But I just don't think there is a silver bullet to solving this issue.

And I think one of the issues that we failed to address in this hearing is the mental health aspect, because I think all of your programs are very beneficial, but the problem is that, when you have people who have mental health issues, unfortunately it takes more than just hard work, it takes more than housing. And I think that is something that we really need to lean into a little bit more at this level. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Panetta.

Mr. HERN. Mr. Chairman, if I may.

Chairman LAHOOD. Yes.

Mr. HERN. For the record, just to prove that I am not a really bad guy, I just had 30 pink roses delivered to my wife. [Laughter.] [Applause.]

Chairman LAHOOD. Hey, good job, Mr. Hern, good job.

We will next recognize Mr. Moore of Utah.

Mr. MOORE of Utah. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member, for hosting us in your great state, and for doing this here at this really important place.

Every one of your testimonies—to all the witnesses, every one of your statements just brings an amount of personal experience that is amazing. It is unprecedented. It is so important and valuable. But your experience in helping solve some of these problems and outlining solutions is even more important than what you have personally gone through.

But also, I would like to just take a quick second to just say, to express my appreciation to those of you that are in the audience for living a Christ-like example, working day in and day out. I know many of you may work at this facility and in other areas. Thank you for your work to provide for those that are the most vulnerable, the poor and needy.

I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and the work that they do is one of the proudest aspects that I have of my faith and its ability to find ways to help people become self-sustaining. It is their number one focus on all matters of helping the poor and needy. And it is truly an inspiration to be involved. It is part of the reason that I wanted to be on this subcommittee. So thank you for all of your efforts and the way that you serve your fellow neighbors.

Mr. Paprocki, continuing on with one of—thank you so much for your focus on the benefits cliff. I mean, it is such a math problem that we should be able to, in Congress, address this. Folks involved in this back in my state in Utah, we have graphed this out, and what it looks like is atrocious on how we disincentivize work so much in our benefits cliffs. And it would be the one thing, if I had my magic wand—we should be able to solve this. And it is the one thing that in this realm we need to do a better job of addressing. So thank you for your focus on it.

I just introduced a bill. It is called the Returning Temporary to TANF Act. And what it is going to do is require states to just put 25 percent of the resources that they receive towards workforce-related issues. Can you speak to the value of keeping—you know, you

do it in your second point about apprenticeship programs. Can you speak to the value of requiring resources towards workforce-related items to helping people get out of the poverty situation that they are in?

Mr. PAPROCKI. Well, thank you, Mr. Moore, for your question.

You know, certainly, the goal is exactly what members of this committee have said, is how do we move people from poverty to prosperity? And there is a lot of steps towards that, right?

And one of the difficulties we have, just front-loaded, is all of the different webs of welfare, right? Federal programs have Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit, SNAP, child support, home energy assistance, supplemental security, and the list goes on and on and on. Then you throw in state-based assistance, and it continues to go on even further.

And, you know, when you start looking at what does success look like, you know, if you go through a theory of change, of, you know, inputs, activities, outputs, success, well, how do you measure that on 40 different scales, right? They all conflict with each other, and that is why you have all of these cliffs.

So I think actually, first and foremost, what your home state of Utah has done has been fantastic. They have a one-door policy where, when you go in, they not only provide you with food and housing and those other things that are essential, but the goal is to try to get people to work. I think we got to expand that outside of the State of Utah into the other 49 states.

But to your question, there is a huge gap. There is a huge gap with training. Right now, here in the State of Illinois, we have 390,000 jobs available. We have 300,000 unemployed people, meaning that we have more than one job for every person right now. But there is a skills gap. And I think what you are talking about, making sure that some of the TANF dollars are dedicated towards training, will go a huge way to make sure that we can take every one of those unemployed people and put them in high-quality, high-paying jobs.

Mr. MOORE of Utah. Thank you. I appreciate the comments on Utah. It is good to hear it from someone outside the state, because my colleagues are sick and tired of me saying it.

Mr. Butler, last, as I wrap up here, oftentimes we hear about, well, we just need to put more money in this. We just need to do—you know, we would provide more funding for these different types of programs. We can't just write more checks to this. We have more fundamental issues. Can you speak to the best way to serve people, other than just money?

Mr. BUTLER. Yes, I think it comes back to getting people to the place where they can work. Folks coming into the homeless shelters in the place that I work, it is getting those folks stable and then using that asset-based approach on how they want to move forward, and then coming alongside of them and helping them to achieve that.

Also, Mr. Panetta brought up the fact that the mental health crisis in the United States of America is atrocious for the United States of America. When we have folks coming in that cannot care for themselves mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and they have to wait seven months or a year for an appointment to

see a psychiatrist, it is absolutely—it is beyond belief that in the United States of America we have to put up with that.

So addressing those issues, funding health clinics to provide more providers and clinicians to care for our mentally unstable folks, I think, it is vital to getting people—

Mr. MOORE of Utah. You took the closing piece I would like to say about my colleague from California. I appreciate that.

Ms. Williams, also, the focus on recidivism, it is key to making sure people are built up to be able to take this on.

Thank you, Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Moore.

Mrs. Steel of California.

Mrs. STEEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for all witnesses for sharing your experiences with us in Chicago. I am just so grateful.

I am a first-generation Korean American. I was born in Korea and raised in Japan. So English is my third language, and I am so grateful to this country. And you know what? We can fix this broken system, and we can reform it, and we can just fix this.

I used to serve in Los Angeles for family and children's services, and we had about 75,000 children inside of the system. And after they hit 18, half of them become homeless people and half of them, when they are getting out of the system, half actually becoming—joining gang members. So it was very dangerous. And I serve in, actually, Los Angeles, 3 cities, and I serve about 12 cities in Orange County. We have 11 million people in Los Angeles. We have over 85,000 homeless people living there. In Orange County 3.2 million people, and we have about 6,800 homeless people. So we really have to fix this, but I need the transition.

So my question is, Mr. Montgomery, that you have almost a lifetime of experience helping individuals go from homelessness and government dependence to a job and self-sufficiency. Based on your work and experiences, can you describe how getting a job can transform a person's life, having transitioned from the government assistance?

And what is it that makes the paycheck so much more rewarding than government assistance?

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Thank you very much, Congresswoman, for your question.

You know, the one positive experience we had with TANF over the years—we had a lot of folks come and go, many of whom, you know, really didn't last very long. But we had a young man come in with his girlfriend. Each of them had a child from a prior relationship, and he actually had an ankle bracelet from his latest engagement with the judicial system. And they were TANF earners. And the relationship was volatile. There were issues, and not the least of which was his alcoholism. And eventually it imploded.

But he remained, and he kept working. He was a fantastic volunteer. He had the best attitude. He was the friendliest. He did whatever you asked him to do. But we really started pouring into him, more than anything, praise, just affirming who he was, and what we saw, and the capacity that was there until one day he came in and he somewhat sheepishly said he had gotten a job, and it was at a fast food restaurant. And so he felt like it wasn't that great

of a job. But we praised him for that, right? We praised and celebrated that he had done this for himself.

He had grown up in an unhealthy environment in which his inherent value and worth hadn't been affirmed and had never been celebrated. Within a year he was running that location. He was a general manager, and he and his son then had their own home, and he was a more present father. It doesn't mean life stopped having its challenges, but who he saw himself as changed.

But what I find, more often than not, for that to happen someone has to have someone else believe in them before they can believe in themselves. And unfortunately, the systems that we have created do the very opposite of that. Thank you.

Mrs. STEEL. Thank you. In California fast food workers are actually getting paid \$20 minimum wage at this point.

Mr. Butler, Pathway Ministries helps thousands of individuals they serve to obtain and maintain employment before they help place them in alternative and independent living arrangement. Pathway Ministries accepts no Federal dollars, correct?

Mr. BUTLER. Correct.

Mrs. STEEL. And are there Federal restrictions that make it impossible for you to carry out your work-focused mission?

Mr. BUTLER. Well, first, we are thankful that the government supplies money and funding for programs and legislations to address poverty issues that we have in our country and the oppression, including homelessness. But we are a faith-based organization, and we are a faith-forward organization. And we desire to share the love of God and God's view of life with everyone we serve without restriction.

While we don't ever force or coerce our belief system on anyone, we are meeting people where they are at, but we do want to share our beliefs and our perspective that Jesus is the answer to all of our brokenness. And because of our holistic approach, we don't want to create a distinction between the secular and the sacred, because we believe part of our spiritual life is work, and part of our spiritual life is the dignity that comes from work.

And so focusing on those physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects, while we could likely qualify for government funding for work readiness programs, we just don't accept it because we want to keep the spirituality part in place with our work lives.

Mrs. STEEL. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman LAHOOD. Thank you, Mrs. Steel.

That concludes our questions this morning. I want to just relay what many of my colleagues have said, and want to thank you for your testimony here today. You have been genuine, and sincere, and insightful, and substantive, and have been very helpful to us as we take the information that we receive from you today through the questions and answers through our site visit yesterday with Pastor Brooks at Project HOOD, and being here today with Pastor Phil. We are grateful.

And I think it also—you know, we live in the greatest country in the world, and there are people that don't always see the benefits of living in the greatest country in the world. And so it is fig-

uring out, from a public policy standpoint, how do we bring more people into that?

And hearing particularly from you, Mr. Butler, and Ms. Schofield, on your journey and your path, and you, Mr. Paprocki, on how you have been able to live that American dream, and live in the greatest country in the world, and so that is what we need to think about.

And we have heard some really wonderful things today about ending the benefits cliff, and talking about tax credits for apprenticeships, and looking at how we institute work requirements appropriately, looking at the mental health and behavioral health crisis, housing crisis, reentry from our prison population. Now we have a responsibility to go back and try to work in a bipartisan way to fix many of the problems we have talked about here today, and bring more people into living the American dream, which we can do in this country.

So again, Pastor Phil, thank you. Thank you to all of you.

And I would just remind—I know the audience provided feedback. If you have not provided the feedback on the clipboards we handed out, please give your suggestions so that we can have that feedback and take that back to Washington, D.C.

And lastly, members will be advised that we have two weeks to submit written questions to be answered later in writing. Those questions and your answers will be made part of the formal hearing record.

With that, our committee stands adjourned.

Mr. DAVIS. Chairman?

Chairman LAHOOD. Yes, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Before you hit the gavel, let me thank you and Chairman Smith for bringing this hearing to Chicago. I know that you could have gone to Peoria. [Laughter.]

Chairman LAHOOD. I brought Peoria here. [Laughter.]

Mr. DAVIS. The waterway is not quite as large.

But I also want to thank all of the witnesses, all of the people from the community who have come and been a part of this. It is indeed a historic setting.

It is also a warmly regarded hearing, where we have been able to share thoughts, ideas, and information with the understanding that we will continue to move to bring to the forefront those solutions, rather than just the questions and the answers.

So again, thank you and Chairman Smith for being in Chicago, if not the greatest country but the greatest city in the United States of America. [Applause.]

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you.

Chairman LAHOOD. Well said, Mr. Davis. And again, I want to thank all of you for your tremendous testimony here today.

And our hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

LOCAL SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Sonja Bell
Company	N/A

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

I am a single mother of four now adults with children. I began working at the age of 15 while in Jr High School. I struggled to keep good affordable housing as I worked for minimum wage paying companies. Although I earned higher grades I was held back by needing sitters and transportation to transport my children to and from sitters, daycare, and elementary school. I graduated in my 11th year and began to pour myself into full-time work with extra hours which limited my time at home with my children and included using public transportation as my means of transport to and from work losing more time with my children. Shortly after I got into an abusive relationship and then I suffered a brain aneurysm when my children were teenagers so work did lift my family out of poverty as I was paying housing costs out of pocket by this time but the aneurysm tossed me backward into poverty again. I earned a good salary which made me proud to graduate from high school and college again while I worked a job.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Wallace Gator Bradley
Company	United in Peace, Inc

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

Wallace Gator Bradley, President/Urban Translator of United in Peace, Inc. I'm a pardoned ex-felon and I'm of the opinion and belief that more funds need to go to the 2nd Chance Act. Because it has help bring those who are returning citizens find jobs and give them dignity.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Anita Brooks E.d.
Company	Youth Entrepreneur Development

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

As a small Mom and Pops Business that offer temporary shelter and job training to the displaced individual in our south Chicago community. I like to know after this type of meeting really and truly where and who do we contact to get the support that we need as a business owner that has been devastated by Covid-19 and we are still suffering form the lost of our facility! Our business need one of the city owned building to operate our non for profit business that do still offer services to our community displaced member 708-477-9422, email: vedcenter@gmail.com, website:youthentrepreneurdevelopment.com

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	William S. Carrol
Company	PLCC A Inc.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

Please expand and create opportunities for professional apprenticeships and internships, while increasing tax-credits for employees for up to 12 months as they help SNAP/TANF recipients to gainful employment. Grow public/private sector programs in both classroom and on-the-job training as well as reimbursing employees fully for additional costs associated with aiding individuals in this transition.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Terry Cunningham
Company	PGM

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

1. I Prayerfully consider establishing, funding, support for organizations similar to CARA (Non-profit organization in Chicago located at 237 S. Desplaines St, Chicago, IL 60661). Also, consider repurposing vacant buildings throughout major cities and engage organizations similar to PGM and those shared by today's witnesses. Thank You!

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Samuel E Dancer
Company	Midtown – Metro Achievement Centers

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

As a prior Juvenile Probation Officer, I had the experience of working with many youth and families that were on Government Assistance. Often, I found that this was not always a need but a systemic crutch the family became dependent upon. Often youth were told to not work so that their SSI did not become disrupted. It is my opinion that reform start first with our youth in educating them in schools about financial literacy, trades and so many other opportunities available to them. These efforts should start in elementary school. In an effort to end the need for welfare, I believe families should be provided case managers that will in collaboration with the family or individual a service plan with goals to accomplish so that they can work towards getting off welfare and become sustainable financial citizens.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Chavez Davis
Company	G'Fellas Hauling LLC

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

I'm a young black man from Chicago. I'm grateful to have this invitation from Congressman Danny Davis and Gator, my political mentors. To have an opportunity to be heard about how to lift individuals out of poverty. They can start by giving us a chance at some of their contracts.

Chavez Davis
Chavezdavis16@gmail.com
312-450-5467

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Leeornez Goodson
Company	Pacific Garden Mission

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

I was a teenage Mom, I dropped out of high school. My mom died when I was 10 years old. I was 19 when wage fare reform came around. I started working at 16 on and off and in the summer job youth program in Chicago. Minimum wage was \$4.75 when I start working. Uneducated, single, parentless child it was hard but I kept working because \$278 was what I would receive from the government. That most definitely was not enough. I didn't go back to school and I should have because I could except that very little money. However I worked and worked. If I didn't get saved and change my life I wouldn't have made it. We have to encourage them to go back to school to get educated. We have to work on minimum wage. It's too low to be able to keep up your household in this day. I was homeless, I went through domestic violence, I didn't have health insurance but by God's graces I'm overweight but no health issues and have 20/20 vision. Mental illness comes into play with a lot of people being homeless they closed all the mental institutes down. So we get a lot of that here at the mission. Most people want to work. But do need help, and programs, and trade's to teach them how to do things. I pray for you all who came out to try and figure things out. I'm a supervisor. However I'm still in poverty. God bless.

-Ms. Lee

P.S. Hope you can read my chicken writing.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Genevieve Laesch
Company	Pacific Garden Mission

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

I work here at Pacific Garden Mission in the mothers and children program, helping families move from instability to hope and empowerment. The issues that homeless families face is extremely complex. The mothers we serve often come from abusive relationships that leave them isolated, poor, and without the hope or skills to move forward. At PGM, our goal is to help families with holistic healing. Many of our families want to work yet face challenges like quality childcare (and sometimes fear of separation with their children due to their own childhood abuse). Transportation, education/job training, lack of stable housing etc. As an example, I am currently working with a teen mom who fled to Chicago due to domestic violence. As she tries to move forward to work, she must first enroll her child in daycare (but first needs to get on Medicaid to get her child a physical and needs to get her child's birth certificate that she doesn't have the money for). She needs to get her GED to get a good paying job. As she waits, she has had to rely on unsafe people to help pay for things like bus fare and baby wipes. This continues to re-traumatize her. I believe that work could help bring hope, dignity, and empowerment to our mothers, yet there are complex issues that keep people from these goals. Although it's a goal, work is not an end all when it comes to the holistic healing of an individual.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Clent Lewis
Company	Real Freedom

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

Love lifts all out of poverty and any ailment that plagues our society. My perspective is one of many in this country that leads to long term solutions. I can't recall a time in history where we've experienced "0" unemployment. There's missing information when it comes to individual and the collective in regard to how one becomes homeless, poverty stricken, and a world of different issues that create that environment. Love is what's needed. "Work" is needed but, not the W2 kind. We need to work towards eliminating the sickness, low self-esteem, lack of a complete family unit and the list goes on. Work may lift a balanced individual out of poverty if they know what life is like under the care of a steady paycheck but, for individuals that know nothing but coas (at any level), and survival simply touting "work lifts individuals out of poverty" doesn't provide long term sustainable growth and prosperity to all.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Vince Meno
Company	Midtown – Metro Achievement Centers

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

Both my Mother and Father grew up in poverty. My father found his escape through work by joining the U.S. Army out of high school and earning additional educational degrees and certifications while also helping to raise 6 kids. He also required all of us to work through volunteering as kids and getting jobs as soon as we turned 16.

My point in sharing this, is that I didn't hear enough about the impact of parent education, multiple career/educational options and exposure, including through diverse mentors (i.e. not just nonprofit or government program staff)

My organization provides the above benefits. We also teach the dignity of work in kids as early as 3rd grade, so people respect/value ALL work, regardless of prestige, and practice that in how they respect the homeless man, the street vendor, or the janitor at their school. Reaching youth can help break the cycle of poverty for so many families.

Thank you.

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	Antonio Williams
Company	Real Freedom

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

I have been to jail many times in my younger day thou I am only 40 now. Going through that gave me an understanding of what a person needs to escape the cycle of poverty so I started Real Freedom to help my community and city and hopefully someone can help us help our city through funding.

312-371-5970
www.onerealfreedom.org

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

Date	April 9, 2024
Name (Print)	George A.H. Williams
Company	GWilliams Associates Inc

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO BE INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD

**Committee on Ways and Means Work & Welfare Subcommittee
Field Hearing on The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty**

We want to hear your story. Below please provide any personal experiences or general comments about how work lifts individuals out of poverty that you wish to be included in the official hearing record.

The issue of reentry is critical to ending welfare and provide dignity to individuals and families! Poverty and welfare and keen will continue if the barriers aren't removed in this country/USA! Continue to funnel reentry Services- and in particular the Second Chance Act! Lastly we've to remove all collateral consequences that!!

**The official hearing record will be made public as part of the transcript. This will be posted on the Committee on Ways and Means website at: <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/>*

PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD



WRITTEN COMMENTS FOR COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORK AND WELFARE JOINT HEARING ON “THE DIGNITY OF WORK: LIFTING INDIVIDUALS OUT OF POVERTY”

Dear Chairman Smith, Chairman LaHood, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in response to the April 9, 2024 field hearing *The Dignity of Work: Lifting Individuals Out of Poverty*.

Founded in 1894, Martha O’Bryan Center (MOBC) is a faith-based nonprofit agency in Nashville, Tennessee, whose mission is to empower children, youth, and adults in poverty to transform their lives through work, education, employment, and fellowship. Since 1948, we have operated from the heart of Cayce Place public housing community, one of Nashville’s most economically distressed communities.

We agree with Chairman LaHood’s comments that work is the surest path out of poverty and has many benefits beyond income. Indeed, meaningful work can provide individuals and families with a sense of vocation, purpose, and dignity, and such work is critical to pursuing economic upward mobility and realizing the American Dream. At the same time, however, we recognize that work alone is not enough to achieve self-sufficiency for all individuals and families. Additional public and private investment is needed to provide training, retention, and upskilling in high-demand, family-sustaining jobs in addition to the supportive services and social capital needed to equip individuals to pursue these opportunities. We must also ensure that our existing public investments are aligned to economic mobility. At Martha O’Bryan Center, we are testing a government-funded intervention that envisions a better way to support families as they work their way out of poverty, and we are building a national learning network to identify and elevate solutions to this persistent challenge (details below). We welcome the opportunity to share more about our efforts and support the work of the Subcommittee.

In our work with families, we have repeatedly encountered several national policy issues that act as barriers to entry into the American middle class. For many families, eligibility for public benefits needed to make ends meet lapses long before households reach the point of earning the wages needed for self-sufficiency. For those that do pursue higher-paying jobs, their family’s increased income often triggers an abrupt loss in benefits that substantially outweighs their increase in income, leaving the family in a worse financial situation – the benefits cliff cited by several Members and witnesses. This is exacerbated by the fact that education and job training services are often misaligned with the career advancement opportunities that would enable long-term self-sufficiency. Through our work with families, it became evident to us that the public benefits system, as it currently exists, keeps too many families anchored to poverty rather than providing families with a pathway to realizing the American Dream.

We believe not only that this broken system can be repaired, but that through coordinated systems and policy change efforts the public benefits system can be transformed to support increased employment, upward mobility, and family well-being. To that end, in 2022 Martha O’Bryan Center organized the Tennessee Alliance for Economic Mobility (TAEM) and received a \$25M investment of TANF funds through a Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative Grant to reimagine how the state supports families in moving out of poverty and into opportunity. A public-private collaborative of 32 partner organizations



across Middle Tennessee, TAEM leveraged these funds to launch the Our ChanceTN pilot, an initiative designed to mitigate the effects of the benefits cliff and incentivize caregivers to pursue economic advancement without fear of the loss of benefits. Our ChanceTN combines family-centered coaching and financial counseling with customized whole-family, educational, and employment training resources that encourage meaningful work and promote career advancement.

Furthermore, to address the benefits cliff directly, we designed a transitional benefit that directly addresses the new household expenses incurred due to a reduction in public benefits (SNAP, housing, Medicaid, childcare). Designed to help families pursue increased income without concern for a net reduction in family resources, this novel transitional benefit is critical to helping caregivers navigate the benefits cliff and meet their families' basic needs as they work to achieve a family-sustaining wage.

A little over a year into the pilot initiative, the results of Our ChanceTN's work are promising with approximately a third of participants having increased their earned income. These early successes make us hopeful that elements of Our ChanceTN's approach can be adapted and scaled to the state and national levels, as we seek to demonstrate what a comprehensive public benefits system designed to support family-sustaining work looks like.

And yet, we recognize that poverty is a complex problem, and that the local solution we are piloting in Middle Tennessee is not the only solution that will be needed. True transformative change on a national scale instead requires coordinated shifts across multiple ecosystems, all driving towards the same goal: creating a public benefits system that promotes economic mobility. For this reason, in 2024 Martha O'Bryan Center launched Beyond the Cliff, a coalition of organizations from across the country collaborating to tackle the benefits cliff. Drawing on the combined expertise of these organizations and the families they serve, Beyond the Cliff partners will work together to identify best practices, propose innovative solutions, and develop a common advocacy agenda to address the broken welfare system that continues to trap so many families in poverty across our nation.

At Martha O'Bryan Center, our mission to overcome poverty is rooted in the belief that every member of our community has the potential to rise above their circumstances and realize the American Dream. At the same time, our experiences have taught us that it will take a bold reimagining of how public human services work in our country to achieve that goal. To that end, we welcome the opportunity to share more about the work of Martha O'Bryan Center and the Beyond the Cliff coalition, and we look forward to working with you as we seek solutions that connect more individuals to meaningful work and employment and effect long-term self-sufficiency for all families.

Sincerely,

Keith Barnes

Senior Director, Beyond the Cliff

711 South Seventh Street • Nashville, TN 37206-3895
phone 615-254-1791 • fax 615-242-3411 • www.marthaobryan.org

