

Labor Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Public Witnesses Hearing
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I would like to start my testimony by thanking Chairman Cole, Vice Chairman Womack, Ranking Member DeLauro and all of the Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the impact of the Federal TRIO Programs on my life. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge my own Congresswoman, Representative Martha Roby, and express my thanks for her support. I am a witness to the fact that TRIO is making a huge difference in shaping the futures of students like me across the Second District of Alabama. TRIO has led to many “firsts” for me, including this visit to Washington, DC, which marks my first experience flying on an airplane and my first time visiting the nation’s capital.

I grew up in a traditional, first-generation household in Greenville, Alabama as the oldest of four children. My parents have always worked extremely hard to provide for my siblings and me. My father maintains several jobs. In addition to working full-time job as an Order Filler at the Wal-Mart Distribution Center, my father also works as a barber, mechanic, and handyman. Meanwhile my mother provides childcare at a local daycare facility. Despite their enduring love and support, I had to look beyond my immediate family for help in pursuing my higher education goals. This is where TRIO stepped in and became like another family for me.

I began my college career at Lurleen B. Wallace Community College. During my early days as a student there, I stumbled upon a flyer inviting students to come to an orientation for the TRIO

Student Support Services program. I didn't realize it at the time, but that first meeting was my welcome to an educational family that would push me to excel in every endeavor. My first year in TRIO was an amazing experience. The Director, staff, and fellow students consistently proved to be reliable sources for help. TRIO's tutoring services were especially critical as I struggled with several of my courses and, at times, feared that I would receive failing grades. This was particularly true of my English Class. However, because of the academic assistance provided by TRIO, I not only passed these classes, but I also earned a few A's along the way.

As my graduation from community college approached, I found myself frustrated as I was completely unsure as to what I wanted to do next. Once again, it was my TRIO family that helped me find my way. The program director and staff helped me navigate the complicated process of transferring to a four-year institution. No matter where I landed, one thing was certain. I knew that I had to become a member of the TRIO Student Support Services at whatever university I attended. Without their help, I don't know if I would have found myself among that handful of low-income, first-generation community college students who manage to successfully transfer to four-year institutions without additional support. Nationally, only 28% of such students manage to transfer; however, TRIO participants transfer at the much higher rate of 41%.

Thanks to the assistance of the TRIO program at Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, last fall I enrolled as a junior at Alabama State University, a historically-black college, where I major in Health Rehabilitation. The change to a four-year institution has been dramatic. Coming into a situation where I didn't know anyone, I felt like a guppie in a huge ocean of fish. On my first day of classes, I knew that I had to find out where the Student Support Services office was located.

When I found the door marked “TRIO,” I felt as though a weight was taken off of my shoulders because I knew that I had found my life support for the rest of my college career. Today, the TRIO program at ASU continues to give me the academic and social support I need in order to succeed.

This support system has been extremely critical for me as I must juggle both my studies and my finances. In addition to benefiting from TRIO, I am also a Pell Grant recipient; however, financial aid alone does not fully meet my needs. So, besides my course load as a full-time student, I maintain two part-time jobs that total about 30 hours per week. More specifically, I work as an office clerk at SuperFoods grocery store and as well as a merchandiser for retailer TNG. I recently added substitute teaching to my work schedule in order to allow me to meet my financial goals.

While my schedule can be overwhelming at times, I know that these years of struggle and sacrifice will be worth it. When I graduate in 2018, I will be the first person in my family to earn a bachelor’s degree. However, I know with certainty that I won’t be the last. Because TRIO played such a big role in my college life, I made sure that my younger brother, who is now a freshman at Lurleen B. Wallace, also got involved with the TRIO program on campus.

When I reflect on my experience, I can truly say that becoming part of TRIO is one of the best decisions that I have made while attending college. I would enthusiastically recommend participation in TRIO Student Support Services to every college student. It can truly be the difference between failing or passing classes; dropping out or persevering to see another semester; succumbing to overwhelming pressures or learning to thrive amidst adversity. I hope

that this Subcommittee will do everything possible to increase funding for TRIO so that more students like me will have the opportunity to achieve their college dreams. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify here today.