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Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Womack, and all of the esteemed members of the House Budget Committee, I thank you all for this opportunity to share my family's personal journey out of poverty.

Growing up, my wife and I were raised in lower to middle-class households, went to public schools and experienced some of the same societal ills that far too many American children face. Abuse, addiction, divorce, depression, and parents who had more bills than money most months, were all a part of the building blocks that formed much of our childhood. In 1993, soon after I completed my senior year, my girlfriend informed me that she was pregnant, and that I had some serious decisions to make. I was terrified, and as confused as I was, it seemed like everyone around me knew more about what I should do than I did. Friends suggested that we should just abort our child, and simply move on with our lives. My mother, though well meaning, was adamant that I needed to take care of my baby, but not marry her mother, because the government would give more welfare money to a single-mother than a married couple - a fact that I would later learn has contributed to over 70% of African-American children being born into fatherless homes.

Despite all of the advice to the contrary, we decided to keep our baby, get married, and trust the Lord for answers along the way. I went from being a popular student leader and a newly enrolled college student, to a poor, college-dropout, and teen father, overnight. The first year of our marriage I made \$11,000 and owed \$17,000 in debt.

While living with one of our relatives, we had to put our baby girl in the bottom drawer of a dresser to sleep because we couldn't afford a crib. Her night light was the orange security light that shone through the window from the back of the grocery store next door, and my wife and I

pillowed our heads in the same bed that they found my alcoholic uncle dead in, just months before we moved in.

After living with a few relatives, and working hard, I was finally able to move my family into a small duplex apartment in a rough neighborhood. Drugs were being sold across the street and the smell of marijuana frequently crept into our home through the paper-thin walls between us and our neighbors. Shortly after we had our second daughter - I was working several jobs and struggling to study for the ministry - we finally worked ourselves off of the “WIC” program. I even started a small cleaning company, and was thankful for any job I could get, including cleaning out roach infested, crack houses for property managers.

I was working so much that one day while I was home between jobs, my wife said she called for me several times without any reply. When she finally found me in the basement, I was zoned-out, staring blankly at an empty TV screen, with tears streaming down my face. I was demoralized, utterly exhausted, and I felt like I was beginning to lose my mind.

However, looking back I can clearly see how the Lord rescued us time and time again, and how when we felt the weakest, He faithfully stepped in to strengthen us. For instance, once when our only car broke down unexpectedly, we had a friend randomly call and say that they got an amazing deal on two cars at the auto auction, and they wanted to bless us with the minivan that they were currently driving. Another night I came home from work and found my wife weeping in the kitchen over the empty cabinets and refrigerator, as she prayed, “Lord, Your Word says that ‘I have never seen the righteous forsaken nor His seed begging for bread’”. That evening her friend called and said that her brother who worked in the meat department of the store up the street, said she could pick up the perfectly good meat that they were about to throw away, and that night we had steak for dinner.

And then there was the year that we decided to step out on faith and take our children out of our failing public school system. We could not afford private school, our family thought we were nuts, but the Lord connected us to a group of homeschool families in our church who took us in, and guided us through the entire process. Years, and a whole lot of criticism later, when we were

able to move into a better neighborhood and enroll our children into a high performing high school, we once again recognized the sovereign hand of God in the decision that we made to homeschool. Two poor, African-American teen parents, with little post-secondary education, somehow raised four brilliant children with exemplary character, who would all rank in the top of their classes: 4.0, 4.3, 4.6 grade point averages, a mentoring program, thousands of hours of community service, GE/Reagan and merit scholars, a neuroscience degree, double majors. With God's help and a strong community of faith, we were blessed to achieve outcomes that many of the public schools in our area could not, and **all from the kitchen table of our modest inner-city home!**

In closing, I understand the pain of poverty and the sense of hopelessness that it can engender. However, I also understand the HOPE that comes from personal responsibility, strong marriages and families, and an ACTIVE faith in Jesus Christ. While there is a place for poverty relief programs in society, I feel that our reliance upon them has become excessive, and that many of them have grossly missed the mark of empowering their recipients to achieve self-sufficiency.

Today, my wife lovingly serves disadvantaged women in one of the poorest neighborhoods of our city. As a youth development consultant and minister, I serve thousands of youth and families per year teaching character education and the Word of God, in communities all across the country and abroad. We just celebrated 25 years of marriage, and our four children are thriving. However, there is nothing special about us, but for the fact that we are trophies of God's grace, and beneficiaries of the love and kindness of family, friends, and others within our community who've committed to love God and love their neighbors. To be clear, personal responsibility, strong marriages and families, and an ACTIVE faith in God is the formula that worked for us. This is the formula that worked for our ancestors before us. And this is **the** formula that will work for America today. **Government programs will only prove successful to the degree that they SUPPLEMENT these key factors without SUPPLANTING them.**

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.