

BRETT FAVRE

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brett Favre, and I very much appreciate the opportunity to testify here today.

I was born and raised in Mississippi. My parents were schoolteachers. I played football for Southern Miss and professional football and was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Since I retired from football, I have engaged in various business enterprises, endorsed products I believed in and, with my wonderful wife Deanna, helped many charities in my home state and elsewhere.

When I was playing football, I had a lot of successes, but also some lows. Those lows helped me find out who I really am—they helped me learn to persevere, overcome challenges and succeed.

But the challenges my family and I have faced over the last three years—because certain government officials in Mississippi failed to protect federal TANF funds from fraud and abuse, and are unjustifiably trying to blame me—those challenges have hurt my good name and are worse than anything I faced in football.

When this started, I didn't know what TANF was. Now I know, TANF is one of our country's most important welfare programs to help people in need. This is a cause dear to my heart and to Deanna's—we have our own Favre 4 Hope Foundation to help disadvantaged children.

In 2020, Mississippi claimed that over \$94 million in TANF funds had been misspent, resulting in criminal convictions of a state official and people running a nonprofit which had received the funds. This nonprofit had had a long-standing partnership with the State and an impeccable reputation.

Mississippi also brought a civil lawsuit against numerous individuals, including me. A court gag order bars the parties from discussing the specifics of the lawsuit. Instead, I'm here to share what I've now seen up close, about how reforms are needed to stop the misspending of TANF funds.

Even before I was sued, when I was informed that the nonprofit appeared to have improperly used TANF funds, I returned to the State the funds I had received, even though I had provided services to the nonprofit and even though I knew, and I know, I had done nothing wrong. I returned the funds, no questions asked.

I had also offered to help raise funds for a new volleyball facility at Southern Miss—the one that's gotten all the publicity. I wanted to help my alma mater and benefit the community. Southern Miss introduced me to the nonprofit to see if they could help with funding. I had no way of knowing that there was anything wrong with how the State funded the project especially

since it was publicly approved by many State agencies and multiple attorneys including the Attorney General.

Sadly, I also lost my investment in a company that I believed was developing a breakthrough concussion drug I thought would help others. As I'm sure you'll understand, while it's too late for me—I've recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's—this is also a cause dear to my heart. Recently, the doctor running this company pleaded guilty to improperly taking TANF money for his own use.

I believe that I got swept up in the civil lawsuit at the instigation of State Auditor Shad White, an ambitious public official, who decided to tarnish my reputation to try to advance his own political career—even after he applauded me for returning the funds and said there was no evidence that I knew TANF funds were involved. There is no evidence because I did not know. Mr. White has shamelessly defamed me anyway based on snippets of text messages which don't at all mean what he says they mean.

And, strangely enough, Mr. White did not bring the TANF misuse issue to the Department of Justice, but to a local D.A. who himself is now under federal criminal investigation. He has profited from his position as someone with “first-hand knowledge of the Mississippi case,” but when my lawyers wanted to question him under oath, he swore he had “no personal knowledge of the events.” I've now sued Mr. White for defamation in a case upheld by the court. Most recently, the Mississippi Attorney General has even sued Mr. White for exceeding his powers in going after me.

I've also learned that the State, believe it or not, is using TANF funds to pay outside private lawyers, Adam Stone and Kaytie Pickett of the Jones Walker firm, to sue me and the others. Those same lawyers, before they sued me, came to my home town to try to convince me to retain them in this very dispute. I also understand that those same lawyers, three years ago, never even interviewed witnesses before they sued me and rejected a settlement offer from Southern Miss to resolve this dispute early on through scholarships for TANF-qualifying students—a settlement that would have shut off the spigot of TANF funds to the lawyers.

Importantly, I have learned that nobody was—or is—watching how TANF funds are spent. Our laws don't sufficiently protect against TANF spending unrelated to helping people out of poverty. States have too much flexibility in how they spend this money, which leads to waste and abuse. We need mechanisms for oversight of TANF spending and greater clarity as to permissible uses of TANF funds. Both Democrats and Republicans should agree—rampant state misuse of TANF funds is hurting efforts to help vulnerable families and children.

I was told the Ways and Means Committee was working on this problem, so I was willing to speak to you to encourage Congress to reform this important anti-poverty program.

I urge Congress to put TANF guardrails in place to ensure that what happened in Mississippi doesn't happen again. I urge Congress to pass the TANF reforms included in the

Committee Member bills—reforms designed to target funds to those truly most in need, to help low-income Americans find and keep a job, to limit how States can spend TANF grants and reduce wasteful bureaucracy and to protect taxpayer funds from fraud and abuse.

In closing, I would like to thank Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Neal for the opportunity to testify.