

Statement for the Record

Sherrie Smoot

Central Analyst

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United States House Committee on Ways and Means

Subcommittee on Human Resources

*Next Steps for Welfare Reform: Ideas to Improve TANF to Help More Families Find Work and
Escape Poverty*

Chairman Charles W. Boustany
Subcommittee on Human Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 30, 2015

Chairman Boustany:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Sherrie Smoot and I am grateful to share my story – a story that shows what perseverance and support can do for someone receiving public assistance.

My mother, brothers, and I had moved a bit when I was young. I went from Washington, D.C. to New York, and returned to Washington, D.C. for good when I was around 12 years old. My mother did not have my transcripts upon our return to Washington, D.C. so I had to be sent to the Woodland Job Corps program. I was in Woodland Job Corps Center for two years and was doing really well in my business and clerical coursework. Soon afterward, I graduated from Woodland Job Corps with certificates in the trades I had studied.

When I returned to the District, I had nowhere to go and was staying house to house; my brother and his girlfriend took me in. I was trying to find work but no one would hire me. I knew nothing about writing resumes, cover letters, or thank you letters. I did not have enough experience to be seen as qualified. A few months later I became pregnant with my daughter Dannie Lee. I tried to get Public Assistance but was turned away. They stated I had to be six months' pregnant so my brother's girlfriend took care of me and after six months, I started receiving Public Assistance. After becoming pregnant with my second child, Frank Lee Jr., the children's father and I separated. After I had my son I had to join a jobs program at a local nonprofit. I gained computer skills and earned certificates. Soon after, I earned a temporary position working with Douglas Resources Inc.

I was not successful in retaining positions due to health and personal concerns. I was mandated to another program where I was able to obtain my GED and gain additional work experience through some temporary and contract positions.

Two years later I went to the University of the District of Columbia after receiving aid from the TAPIT program. I have since received my Bachelor of Computer Information Systems Science. Around a year and a half later I earned my first IT temporary job working for Corestaff at the Advisory Board Company.

When that contract ended I was sent another letter to join a workforce program. I picked America Works of Washington, D.C. There, I learned how to write cover letters, build resumes, and build self-confidence and how to prepare for interviews. I also had the opportunity to build my resume by participating in a work experience assignment with the District's Department of Human Services. While at AWDC I was also warmly referred to the Program Recruiter for the

Veterans Group. Although not a Veteran, I was invited to attend the Veterans Group and took up CompTIA A+, Security+, Network+, CCNA, CCENT, Microsoft Windows Server and MCTS classes in which I graduated with a Security Administration and a Network Administration Completion Certificate and as a Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist.

I now work with Teksystems at the Environmental Protection Agency as a Call Center (Central Analyst). My daughter is in college aiming to be a United States Marshal, my oldest son is graduating from high school this year and going to college aiming to become a FBI agent, and my youngest son is in junior high school. My TANF case has been successfully closed since August 2014.

Honestly speaking, America Works is a program that has the best staff, and they make you achieve when you think that you can't. They taught me how to express myself and how to have confidence, and now the road that I am on has inspired me to shoot for the stars.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity. I look forward to any questions.