

Testimony of Taquana Spicer before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, U.S. Senate, April 10, 2007.

To the Chairman and Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Please let me begin by introducing myself. My name is Taquana Spicer and I live in Clayton County, Georgia. I work as an administrative assistant with Hearts to Nourish Hope, a non-profit agency that offers services to at-risk youth. I've obtained my position through the TANF work program, and I've been with my organization for four years. I also have three children, ages 10, 6, and 2.

Before I obtained my current position, I was out of work and found myself living in a shelter in Fulton County with my children. I was in the shelter for six months, and during that time I could not find a job. I was finally able to move out to Clayton County with my mother's help - she had received a small amount of back child support from my father, and used the money to help me find housing. But while I was moving, I missed an appointment to transfer my TANF and Food Stamps cases from Fulton to Clayton County and my benefits were terminated. I found myself living in Clayton County with no job, no benefits and no food for my children. When I had so little money that I could not afford bus fare, I walked four and a half hours to the local DFACS office to re-apply for my benefits. At that time I was enrolled in the Clayton County TANF work program. Because I wasn't given emergency food stamps at that time, the woman in charge of the TANF work program, Diane Danley, bought me \$50.00 worth of groceries to get me through the month, and I will always be grateful for her assistance. Ms. Danley also decided that it would be better for me to obtain clerical experience, rather than finding another job as a sales clerk. She placed me in my current position with Hearts to Nourish Hope, and I was eventually given a full-time position.

I love my job and working with my organization. We help older children who are at-risk - providing GED classes, counseling, help with homework and a place to go after school. I love the children, and I see how many of them are in the same position I was in when I was their age. I want to help them go about things in a different way than I did. I also love my co-workers and my boss, and I feel so lucky to work where I do.

In my position with Hearts to Nourish Hope I work full-time, and take home pay is approximately \$960 a month. My rent is \$700 a month, plus I have expenses for child care, utilities, and public transportation, as well as for the children's clothing and supplies. I do not receive any child support. Without my monthly allotment of food stamps, which is \$462, I would not be able to make ends meet. If my food stamps were cut, even by \$50, I wouldn't be able to pay some other bill, such as my lights, gas, or even rent. I always use plenty of coupons when I shop, and I typically buy my food at Wal Mart. Because I buy bulk foods, they last a lot longer. I usually spend \$150-175 every two weeks on groceries. Sometimes I have enough food for my children, and sometimes I don't, it typically depends on whether or not the children are out of school. Because they eat breakfast and lunch at school, I have a harder time during holidays or on the weekends. I am currently worried about spring break week, which is coming up soon. Food Stamps are so important for someone like me.

I am very hopeful that one day I will no longer have to receive Food Stamps. I obtained my GED in 1999, and am going to go back to school this fall to study in business administration. I plan to attend Shorter College, and am optimistic that going back to school will lead to an increase in my income. In the meantime, the help I receive from the Food Stamps Program will enable me to achieve my goals. I also want the best for my children, and what I want most for them is that they won't have receive Food Stamps when they are adults. I also want to be able to provide them with the things that they need and good, nutritious food. I am grateful to the food stamps program for helping me be able to do this, and I want to thank you for your generous support of the program. I know many other people who are like me, who work hard, and who need just a little bit of help to make a better life for themselves and their children.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to tell me story. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.