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National Commission on Hunger
Portland, Maine

Hello Commission Members,

Thank you for taking the time to review my comments.

I am receiving assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. I am also a full-time student at Husson University working towards a bachelor of science in paralegal studies. I am graduating May 2016. I am a recipient of a Competitive Skills Scholarship which helps me with gas, buying textbooks, and auto repair if my car breaks down. This semester I am taking five courses and maintaining a 4.0 GPA. I travel from my home in China to Bangor and back to take my classes.

I'd like to provide you with a little history about my personal situation and to inform you how SNAP has helped me through difficult times and provides me with the support I need to move forward with my education, work and hopefully financial independence in the not so far future.

I worked in direct care for about twelve years. Direct care, where a trained, professional care giver takes care of someone with disabilities or an elder in their home, or in a nursing home. I did this for twelve years. My average pay was about \$10 an hour. When I worked in home care, I never got forty hours a week. The closest I came was with one client who was approved for thirty-six hours of care a week.

I then ended up working full-time at a local nursing facility. With this came the benefits of health insurance and paid time off (something lacking in home care), but the wage was still the same. Working full time for two and half years, I never made more than \$20,000 a year. I worked full-time and never made more than \$20,000 annually.

It was hard work with very little financial compensation. I did not have a car payment. I was able to barely make my mortgage every month, but needed help to heat my house. I needed (and still need) to put a new roof on my house. An agency I asked about help with the roof said to me, "Get a low interest loan to pay for the repair." That's all well and good when you can afford to pay the money back. I was not in that position (nor am I now).

I was working full-time when the governor made a comment about people receiving assistance getting their behinds off the couch and finding a job. I had a job, a full-time job taking care of others and yet I couldn't take care of what I needed to.

This being poor while working full-time gets to wearing on a person. I decided the way to get out of being poor was to head back to school. I started my college education when I started that full-time job with the nursing home. I then transferred to Husson University to finish it out. With the transfer came a change in my employment status. I dropped down to per diem status to be allowed to attend classes.

Then, during my first semester at Husson, I was diagnosed with cancer. That diagnosis made me realize it is time to take care of myself and let others who are younger and stronger than I continue in direct care. I left that per diem position last summer and started a part-time job with a local grocery store. This job pays the same as my direct care jobs, but comes with no stress. Through the treatments for cancer, I applied for food stamps.

Back in December, 2014, I learned I was losing my food stamps benefits because I am what the government considers an ABAWD, an Abled Bodied Adult with no dependents. Because of this, I allegedly did not qualify for food stamps. I had to meet the twenty hours per week work or volunteer requirement. I hardly ever got twenty hours from my part-time cashiering job and certainly was not getting those hours while in school at Husson four days a week with traveling back and forth included. I asked the intake worker at DHHS how she thought I could achieve this. She did not know.

I appealed the decision and then learned that I am an ABAWD. One thing the Department of Human Services overlooked was that I am a full-time student receiving educational assistance through the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program. I am back in school, learning a new trade, so that I can support myself without relying upon public assistance. Because of the Competitive Skills Scholarship, I am eligible for food stamps. Thank goodness. I am living off my student loans, living on a shoe string. It is not easy. The food assistance is a huge help.

I honestly do not understand the Governor's and the DHHS Commissioner's actions in cutting back and making it harder to get help. I am not home sitting on my behind on the couch in front of the television. I am a full-time student that needs a hand up, not a hand out. I have no intention of relying on food stamps for the rest of my life. I am graduating next May 2016. With my degree I will be able to get decent Work that pays a livable wage. The assistance I am receiving is a bridge between my old career and my new one.

I think the decision makers, really need to take a look at who is receiving assistance. I think the majority of people receiving assistance are not gaming the system. Like me, they are likely experiencing a difficult time in their lives and just need a hand up, not a hand out. Instead of attacking Welfare, our elected officials all the way from the Governor to the local select board need to be working on ways to bring good paying jobs to Maine. Working for \$7.50 or \$10 an hour is hardly livable.

I urge the members of this Commission to recognize that the eligibility requirements are so tough that many more Mainers are going hungry. Roughly 1000 veterans are without their SNAP benefits. That is not right. We are better than that. I hope you will do what you can to recommend that states do everything they can to take advantage of opportunities to help people from going hungry. Requiring states to request geographic waivers from work requirements for example where unemployment is high and jobs or other opportunity does not exist would help.

Thank you.

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