

Dear Members of US House of Rules committee,

My name is Georgia Allen, I was born in Chicago, IL and raised and live in Madison, WI. I am a 36 year old single mom, now a middle class citizen who works audaciously to promote systems that allow everyone the pathway to self sufficiency.

Even before the pandemic the number of individuals/ families living in poverty, working poor were great and even greater now. Getting to the middle class for many means navigating the complicated world of how changes to wages, employer benefits, and public benefits eligibility impact net-income. This is becoming even more complicated as policies change to address the ongoing economic crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in at this round table. Today I am going to share some of my personal experience and professional knowledge navigating benefits as a poverty/working poor class in the US.

As you have so graciously shared, food insecurity is interdependent upon an individual/ family's economic stability to obtain/maintain housing, childcare, quality education and healthcare. I learned a lot on my journey about what has/ hasn't worked when needing to utilize public benefits as you aspire to no longer depend on them and seek a path to the middle class.

In my case the ending Generational poverty cycle and disrupting Rules that promote benefit cliffs and decrease our intention of public benefits helping families achieve economic stability and no longer need to depend on them unless you have to.

My Story-

Growing up, my mom worked multiple jobs to support my 4 siblings and me and couldn't risk losing food share, healthcare subsidy and other critical support that her wages alone couldn't cover.

At age 16, I secured my first real job making minimum wage at Subway. It wasn't much money, but it put our combined family income above the eligibility limit for FoodShare, Medicaid, and other assistance, causing us to experience a benefits cliff. My job couldn't make up for these losses, so I had to quit.

When I became an adult and had a family of my own, I was better able to navigate my career path because I learned how to navigate resources by understanding what benefits were actually helpful and those that were contributing to my cycle of poverty.

The trauma experienced making daily decisions about meeting basic day to day needs (multiple jobs) and juggling the benefit cliff and all the health/behavioral challenges children in poverty experience don't leave room to pursue. Science has proven the short/long term physical, mental exhaustion that comes with survival. Those that navigate benefit cliffs over repeatedly without the right resources to feel the gap and no support after the cliff ultimately give up.. they feel trapped.

I know that from watching so many families including my own fall into the vicious trap in the cycle of generational poverty.

My contribution to disrupting the generational poverty cycle and helping communities of low wealth, collectively build wealth to invest in resources people need to fill the gap between a benefit cliff and economic stability.

I work audaciously to promote awareness within State entities, nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies to enhance resources through efficiency of community support to promote a strong economy and workforce.

Some of my social impact ventures in founding 2 low wage industry cooperative, home care and child care-

- SIC- worker owned home care agency to strengthen the wages, training, worker support and resources needed to ensure adults have access to quality care.
- Village Star Network is a family child care incubator that supports both formal/ informal providers with startup, maintenance of family care sites that serve low wealth/public assistance dependent families. The network provides access to around the clock childcare, career architecture, peer support, coaching and Public/ private benefit cliff navigation- w/ assistance of the Opportunity Calculator app I helped develop.

Sincerely,

Georgia Allen