

Congressman Jim McGovern – Visit to Capital Area Food Bank – June 23, 2021
Client Leadership Council Convening: The Power of Voice
Client Leadership Council Member Testimonies

Melody Lawson:

My name is Melody Lawson. I was born and raised in Washington DC. My mom was a single parent, and helping her raise my sister and I was my best friend, my heart-beat, who spoiled me rotten, none other than my grandmother. I grew up in Ward 5 NE DC, in the area now called Carver Terrace, which was a working-class neighborhood. My mother had made many sacrifices raising my sister and I. She wanted to ensure that both of us would become strong, balanced, educated, independent and well-rounded women. She worked two jobs and made sure that we were exposed and involved in various activities. She expected you to finish what you started. She exposed us to important things in life, like going out to restaurants, entertainment, Broadway plays, going to church, and travelling. My first trip out of the country was a trip to Spain, which she paid for. I played basketball in high school as a point guard, which was my first love. And tennis was my second love!



After attending Towson State University for about two years, my mother finally told me that the post office had called me. I had taken the post office test my senior year in high school. Initially, my family didn't tell me they called, because they were afraid that I would not finish college. So I made a promise to myself that, come hell or high water, I would get my degree. It took about 5 years, but I did it while also working at the Post Office. It does not matter how long it takes, but that you are able to cross the finish line. There were many who were smarter than me, and things came easy for them, but they didn't finish. I struggled through various points on the journey, and later got another degree.

I still worked at the Post Office and it was another world itself. It was the job I stayed at the longest (9 years), and was also "The Pit of Hell." I promised myself that I would not stay at a job where I was not happy. After I left, I worked two jobs to maintain the lifestyle that I was accustomed to. I worked as a counselor, paralegal, HIV case manager, welfare-to-work case manager, addiction counselor, school-based case manager, a contractor with FEMA, and youth correction officer. Some of my haters had the audacity to tell me that I don't know what I want to do because I worked various jobs. My rebuttal was "God did not put me here on this Earth to do just one thing." It helped me for the most part to stay gainfully employed.

One of my last full-time jobs was working at the airport as a security officer. I stayed there two years longer than I wanted to. I was commuting about four hours a day on public transportation – two hours there, and two hours back. It was during this time when my paycheck was going down, and my rent in Columbia Heights was going up, that I occasionally used a food bank. Later, my mom's health continued to decline. I made the decision to move in with her and be her primary caretaker. Shortly after, I had to quit my job at the airport. That's when I started using the food bank more frequently, because I didn't have an income. I never thought or imagined that I would be in a predicament like this.

I love good food, and helping people comes naturally to me. While at the food bank, I saw a flyer about being on the Client Leadership Council. Because of my previous work experience and life experience, I felt like I had something to give. Along with having people and interpersonal skills, creative skills, and work skills, I decided to get involved. I have had to travel to various sites, find out what the needs were, and it has been both interesting and rewarding. I am working to advocate to end food insecurity with the Capital Area Food Bank, and sharing my story is one way to help others.