

U.S. Senate, Special Committee on Aging

Statement for Field Hearing on “Economic Challenges and Opportunities for Older Americans”

Valerie A. Jones

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Thank you, Senator Braun, for hosting us today. It’s great to see you again after meeting you last spring when I was in DC for Goodwill on the Hill.

I’m here to share the story of how I returned to the workforce as a senior citizen and the challenges and victories I’ve experienced.

As a member of the “baby boomer” generation, I’ve had many careers in my lifetime. After college graduation, I worked for the Internal Revenue Service in Georgia. I married and moved to Indianapolis where I taught English and Reading and adult education for Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). As many women of my generation did (and many women are still forced to do), I left the workforce when my children were born. Following a divorce, I moved back to Georgia to care for my ailing mother and my disabled daughter. After my mother passed, I returned to work for several years as a bank branch manager.

In 1994, I left the workforce when I became disabled. I also was caring for my disabled adult daughter. I remained unemployed, trying to live off Social Security Disability Insurance until 2017 when I learned about the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at my local Goodwill.

SCSEP saved my life. I felt I had been discarded and wondered who would take a chance and give me, an older person, a job? But the free program got me into paid training that ended up

with me being hired as the assistant to the philanthropist at St. Vincent De Paul. With the help of SCSEP and my employment coach, I became reenergized. I overcame my fear of technology, learned new computer skills, and regained the dignity that comes with work.

As an older worker in 2023, my struggles and experiences are not unique to what many Americans have to endure. I've had to budget my expenses; deal with inflation; navigate complex social service programs; and care for aging parents while also raising children. Now that I'm the aging parent, I'm also adapting as my own disabilities worsen. I'm currently unable to drive and becoming more reliant on others for day-to-day support. In today's world, seniors also have to have a heightened sense of awareness of issues related to security (cybersecurity, physical safety, identity theft, etc.).

We older adults still have a lot to give, but we need flexible training opportunities to develop new skills or credentials and refresh some older skills. Older workers bring a lot of potential and value to employers as we are hard-working, loyal, and dependable. We have a lifetime of wisdom and experiences that we can share with employers and teammates. I take pride in serving as a mentor to colleagues at work, and youth in my community. We may need to learn some new skills, but that's why programs like the Senior Community Service Employment Program are crucial for older adults. At a time when many industries are facing workforce shortages, we can help fill employment gaps in the labor market.

Thank you for the opportunity to share a little about my experiences. When I enrolled in the SCSEP program, I was hopeful that it would lead to a new career path at the age of 66. I never imagined that it would also result in this chance to appear before all of you.