

Hocking Metropolitan Housing Authority

50 South High Street

Logan, Ohio 43138

(740) 385 3883 / Fax (740) 385 0230

Email office@HockingMHA.org

Testimony of Tarrah J. Leach

Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Participant

On behalf of the

Hocking Metropolitan Housing Authority

Before the

House Committee on Financial Services

Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity

May 17, 2005

Mr. Chairman:

My name is Tarrah J. Leach. I am a divorced mother of 3 children. I have been a participant in the Section 8 Housing Choice Program since 1998. I am here to testify on House of Representative Bill 1999.

I have recently received my LPN from Hocking College. It has taken me a lot to get where I am today. I have come a long way. I am very proud of my accomplishments, and myself but let me tell you how I got here.

I lived with my grandparents most of my life because my mother had her own difficulties. At the age of 16, I went to stay with my sister in Lancaster, Ohio for the summer. I met a man named James. Of course at 16 I thought I was in love. My sister moved back to Columbus, Ohio before the summer was over. I decided to stay. My Mother still did not seem to have interest in me. So at the age of 16, I was by myself with my boyfriend. We stayed with various people that we could.

I found out that I was pregnant and I quit school. We ended up in a homeless shelter in Lancaster, Ohio. We had to stay in separate buildings. We got up every morning and left the night shelter and went to the day shelter. We ate breakfast and lunch at the day shelter then walked across town to the night shelter for dinner and for the night. The worst part of it all was that James was abusive to me. But me being 16, I was “young and dumb” as they say. I didn’t know the law or what love was. I thought it would get better. We got married when I was 17. I had given birth to my 1st daughter 3 months earlier.

We applied for housing assistance with Fairfield Metropolitan Housing. After being on the waiting list for one year, we got on Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program in Lancaster, Ohio. We got a little apartment in Lancaster, so I thought things would get better. I was wrong, the abuse got worse, and I had another daughter at the age of 18. I finally got the courage to leave him and went to stay at a domestic violence shelter for women. I got divorced.

I met another man shortly thereafter. You could say I jumped out of one frying pan into another. David and I moved to Logan, Ohio into a little apartment. I got my drivers license at age 18. That was no small accomplishment. I got pregnant again at an age 20. I got married to David when I was five months pregnant. He lost his job so we decide to apply for Section 8 Housing Program in Hocking County, Ohio.

I decided when I was pregnant with my 3rd daughter that I wanted to get my GED. I didn't want my kids to be able to say that I never graduated from high school. So, my 3rd daughter was born in October 2001 and my GED was issued December 12, 2001. That was a very big accomplishment.

David and I moved to a 3-bedroom trailer in Logan, Ohio. We had various problems throughout our relationship. He would not keep a job. So I worked.

Well, after having 3 kids, I never thought I would go to college, but my GED teacher at the Volunteers of America had told me that I scored very high on my GED and that I should go to college. So I got the courage up and I decided I had always liked helping people so I would go to school to become a nurse. So in June of 2002, at the age of 21, after not being in school since I was 16, I stepped foot in college.

My husband was not behind me to say the least. We ended up divorcing. But after starting college, I was not going to let anything hold me back anymore.

I went though 2 years of nursing school, raised 3 kids by myself and worked a part-time job at Wal-Mart to accomplish my goals. Yes, I did have to sacrifice time away from my kids by working and going to school, but it was all for them.

Throughout my 2 years in nursing school, I maintained a 3.8 GPA, made the Dean's list every quarter, made the President's list in January 2003, Superior Academic achievement award in 2003. My name is published in the National Dean's list. I have been Vice President of the National Honor Society, Phi Theta Kappa, since I started. I graduated 4th in my class with honors. I accomplished this while raising my 3 children and working.

The Section 8 Housing Assistance has helped me achieve so many of my goals. If it had not been for the Housing Assistance, I, as a single mother, would not have been able to put a roof over my children's heads. I wouldn't have had the time to devote to school to better my education for myself and my children.

My children would have suffered because I would have had to work all of the time just to make ends meet to pay rent and utilities.

I know I am not the only single mother out there with children that has goals and sees them slowly fade away because of the struggles that we go through to survive. Facing issues like not receiving child support to having to work all the time, or to have the government to want to take programs away, are the barriers that challenge our ability to attain those goals.

I am living proof that one person can make a difference and make their life better when given the support and opportunity to succeed.

After listening to what I have went through before I have received help, to how I bettered myself while I received help, how can you take that away?

The government teaches us to better ourselves and get off welfare and HUD. But how can you better yourself to get off of these programs, if you take them away before giving the people the chance to try and succeed as I have.

When I got my new job, I reported my changes to Hocking Metropolitan Housing Authority. I now earn \$15.50 an hour and work 30 hours per week. I gross \$465 per week. With this income, with a four-person household, I am still within the income range for eligibility for the Section 8 program. The Housing Authority has told me that I am at 46% of the area median income for Hocking County. But the Fair Market Rent for our area is low, I will be no longer be receiving any housing assistance.

I rent a 3-bedroom manufactured home for \$430 a month plus utilities. With my new income amounts I will be paying all my own rent beginning July 1, 2005. I am looking forward to being self-sufficient after my long struggles.

My success did not happen overnight. It has taken me over 7 years to achieve some of my goals. I am a very motivated person, but someone a little less sure of their goals would take a lot longer to get to the place that I

am today. I would like to see others be able to fulfill their goals even if it takes a long time.

While I am grateful for the assistance, I am worried that others will not have the opportunity to improve their life with the same support I received. It is my understanding that when I go off the voucher program, the voucher will not be reissued because of budget cuts in the Section 8 program.

I feel this is unfair to those that have waited so long to get housing assistance.

I ask that you consider my story before creating any time limits to the program, changing any of the income targeting for benefits and providing adequate funding for the program as it exists.