

**BACK TO WORK: EMPOWERING ALABAMA'S  
AGING WORKFORCE**

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**FIELD HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**  
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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## **BACK TO WORK: EMPOWERING ALABAMA'S AGING WORKFORCE**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2018**

U.S. SENATE,  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING,  
*Birmingham, Alabama.*

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:27 p.m., at Jefferson State Community College, Shelby Campus, 4600 Valleydale Road, Birmingham, Alabama, Hon. Doug Jones, presiding.

Present: Senator Jones.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JONES**

Senator JONES. All right. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this field hearing called "Back to Work: Empowering Alabama's Aging Workforce."

I apologize for my voice. It is not because I have been yelling at Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer, but it just happens on occasion. So I am going to try to make sure I get through all of this, with the statement and questions, but my Deputy Legislative Director, Katie Campbell, who is on a phone call out there, will be joining us shortly, so I will turn it to her in case I just completely wear out.

Folks, this is a unique opportunity to bring the work of the Senate Special Committee on Aging to Alabama. I want to thank Chairwoman Susan Collins and Ranking Member Bob Casey and their staff for helping facilitate this hearing. It has been a privilege to serve on this Committee this year since taking office in January, though I often tell folks that I was placed on the Aging Committee not as a member but as an exhibit.

[Laughter.]

Senator JONES. I want to also thank our witnesses who are here today. Each of you bring a unique perspective on the workplace and employment issues facing older workers. I appreciate your willingness to share your expertise and insights with us today. Your input will be valuable as this Committee works to serve our seniors.

Both in Alabama and across the country, our population is aging rapidly. Our labor force is aging as well. In 2006, workers ages 55 and over represented just 16 percent of American workers. In 2016, that number had grown to 22 percent, and by 2026, older workers will account for nearly one-quarter of the U.S. labor force.

Employment has many benefits for older workers, including improved health, cognition, and overall well-being. It also has clear financial benefits. In addition to providing workers with a steady source of income, continuing to work can improve retirement secu-

ity. Additional working years can provide individuals with more time to save and with increased Social Security benefits when they do retire.

Unfortunately, many older Americans who would like to work or continue working are limited in their ability to do so. Unemployment disproportionately affects older adults. Across the country more than three million older adults are searching for full-time work. Many more find themselves on a plateau in their current job and face challenges finding a better job elsewhere.

In addition to facing age discrimination and the difficulty of managing health problems, many older adults who are looking for work find they need to update their professional skills or learn new ones. Older workers who face these challenges tend to experience extended periods of unemployment and may leave the labor force altogether.

Despite these challenges, there are efforts at the local, state, and federal level to help seniors maintain and achieve fulfilling careers. Federal programs like the Senior Community Employment Service Program and local initiatives like Back to Work 50+ Program have helped to provide thousands of older workers with the training and support they need to advance their careers and find high-quality employment opportunities.

I am delighted to have representatives from both those programs on our panel of witnesses today. I am eager to learn more about your experiences working on this important issue, and I hope we can also use this opportunity to identify ways that Congress can help support your efforts. So thanks again for coming and for your service to Alabama's older workers.

I want to turn this over to our panel, and we will go in this order. I want to introduce our panelists, and then I will ask each of them to make an opening statement, and then we will just get into questions and answers and maybe even a dialog.

First we will hear from Dr. Tamara Payne, the director of Career and Learning Services here at Jefferson State. Dr. Payne oversees the school's career center and is project director for its Back to Work 50+ Program. Dr. Payne will tell us about Jefferson State's efforts to support older workers, including the women's Economic Stability Initiative.

Next we will hear from Ms. Montana Dorsey-Collins, a Back to Work 50+ participant. After completing the Back to Work Program, Ms. Dorsey-Collins received a scholarship from the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council for its Certified Product Technician Program at Jefferson State. I look forward to hearing more about your experience in the Back to Work 50+ Program, Ms. Dorsey-Collins.

I am also grateful to have Ms. Lori Strauss with us today. Ms. Strauss has joined us from the AARP Foundation in Washington, DC, where she serves as the manager of workforce programs. Ms. Strauss leads the Back to Work 50+ national program and will tell us about the AARP Foundation's workforce initiatives.

Ms. Sheila Baker joins us from the Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging, also known as M4A. There Ms. Baker administers the Senior Community Service Employment Program for Shelby, Jefferson, Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties. Ms. Baker

will discuss the SCSEP program and its impact on older workers in Alabama.

Last, but not least, we will hear from Mr. Doug Dean, the Chief of Human Resources at Children's of Alabama. Children's has shown an impressive leadership in promoting age diversity with baby boomers accounting for a quarter of his workforce. Mr. Dean will tell us more about Children's efforts to support older workers and the many benefits of doing so.

I have also promised Mr. Dean that I would not discuss another program that he and I participate in for folks over the age of 50, and that is what is known as the BBB baseball game out at Rickwood. For over 50-plus folks, we play a ball game every year, or try to, known as "Beer, Baseball, and Ben Gay."

[Laughter.]

Senator JONES. I have promised not to ask Mr. Dean any questions regarding his baseball skills, and he has promised not to make any comment about mine.

So, with that, I would like to turn it over to—let us go in the order that I introduced folks. If we could hear from Dr. Payne first, the director of Career and Learning Services here at Jefferson State.

**STATEMENT OF DR. TAMARA PAYNE, DIRECTOR OF CAREER AND LEARNING SERVICES, JEFFERSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM, AL**

Dr. PAYNE. Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Jones and other members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging field hearing. I am honored to speak with you this afternoon regarding the Back to Work 50+ Program at Jefferson State Community College and the unique needs that are faced by 50+ job seekers. Jefferson State has been fortunate to be a part of the Back to Work 50+ Network since the latter half of 2014, and in 2016 we welcomed the Women's Economic Stability Initiative, the WESI family.

The major components of the Back to Work 50+ program is that participants are invited to a 7 Smart Strategies Workshop where we discuss the seven effective habits for 50+ job seekers. From there, participants are accepted into the program, and we do deep dives into individual and group coaching, and we also do a computer skills assessment because we have learned that our Back to Work 50+ candidates are sometimes lacking in those basic computer skills, and that has been an immense barrier to employment.

After success with the Back to Work 50+ classic program, we were approached by AARP Foundation with thoughts of participating in the Back to Work 50+ WESI Program. As I mentioned earlier, that is the Women's Economic Stability Initiative, and it has more of a focus on 50+ candidates that are female.

Some Alabama figures specifically related to unemployment. As of 2018, 16.9 percent of women in Alabama ages 60 to 64 are underemployed. As of October 2018, women ages 50 to 64 spent over 30 weeks of time unemployed when compared to the average of ten weeks by their counterparts ages 20 to 24. So Jefferson State's selection as a WESI partner was an indicator of our success with the classic program, but it also hinged upon the needs of female candidates ages 50+ in Alabama.

Specific outcomes for Back to Work 50+ at Jefferson State: Since 2014, we have served over 853 50+ job seekers; 133 individuals received individual and group coaching, and 179 50+ candidates have been hired with an average wage of \$13 an hour.

Some indicators for success: We suggest that you use a cohort model when you are working with 50+ job candidates because sometimes you can feel isolated, and you can think that you are the only individual that is at this stage in your life, and we like for them to see faces and hear stories that mirror their own. We love the fact that it embeds basic and intermediate computer skills because, again, we want to focus on skills that are lacking. We found that some of our Back to Work 50+ candidates had these skills, and we need to redevelop them. And we also found that more than half of our candidates lack the skills.

We look at short-term, industry-focused training programs that are hinged upon in-demand jobs, because we do not want them to finish a program that is designed for their unique needs and still be in the same economic position.

We also love embedding mock interviews with local employers so that way they get feedback not just from their coaches but the potential individuals or entities that are going to hire them. And we love to highlight success stories. We want our Back to Work 50+ candidates to see faces and hear stories, again, that mirror their own and hear what happened once they came into your program.

We are going to end my segment with a video that highlights both Jefferson State Community College's partnership with AARP Foundation, and it highlights some of our Back to Work 50+ WESI candidates and their success stories.

[Videotape played.]

Thank you.

Senator JONES. Very nice. Thank you very much for that.

So next we will hear from Ms. Montana Dorsey-Collins.

**STATEMENT OF MONTINA DORSEY-COLLINS, BACK TO WORK  
50+ PARTICIPANT, BIRMINGHAM, AL**

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. Thank you. Again, my name is Montana Dorsey-Collins, and I have been through the Back to Work 50+ Program at Jefferson State College, and I cannot say enough good things about it. My experience has been exceptional. From excellent life coaching and learning new skills and the wonderful support that I have from being in the Back to Work 50+ involvement has taught me that I am not alone in my search for a better job.

I accidentally found the program by going to the state employment office located at the One Stop Career Center on the campus. They recommended the program to me, and I went to the information session where I learned about the program and the strategies for gaining employment for people over 50. Finding a job is so different than it was when I first started working.

My Back to Work 50+ coaching sessions were invaluable. We talked about the difficulties of finding new and better employment for people over the age of 50. The coaching helped me to see the value in myself and the many skills that I already possess.

The program has offered me fantastic technical skills and refresher skills. The program led me to Ready to Work, and now I



am in the Certified Production Technician program. These classes have taught me technology basics, workplace behaviors, resume building, and it has taught me how to find and apply for jobs online. My Certified Production Technician classes are also preparing me for a career in the automotive manufacturing industry, and I am looking forward to a career that will change my life and give me the new skills that I need.

And, last, I cannot say enough about the Back to Work 50+ staff. I am currently working selling cemetery plots and headstones. My current job has no advancement opportunities, and my income is solely based on sales. My coaches have taught me and have taken the time to have one-on-one sessions with me to discuss my needs and where I want to be in my career and where it should take me from here. They have helped me to see the need for certification training and how it can help my career objectives.

I am grateful to have found such a great opportunity through the Back to Work 50+ Program, and I know that it has helped me, and I know it can help others.

Thank you.

Senator JONES. Thank you, ma'am.

Next I will turn to Ms. Lori Strauss with the national AARP Foundation.

**STATEMENT OF LORI STRAUSS, MANAGER OF WORKFORCE PROGRAMS, AARP FOUNDATION, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. STRAUSS. Thank you. Senator Jones and members and staff of the Committee, AARP Foundation thanks you for inviting us to testify at today's hearing to discuss how we can empower and equip older workers to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging workforce. With nearly 38 million members nationwide and more than 440,000 members in Alabama, AARP is the Nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. I am Lori Strauss, the workforce programs manager for AARP Foundation, and right now I am feeling really proud to be one of the people who started this program. At AARP Foundation, we work to end senior poverty by helping vulnerable older adults build economic opportunity and social connectedness. As AARP's charitable affiliate, we serve AARP members and nonmembers alike.

Today I am going to talk about how, together, all of us help older workers battle age discrimination, build new skills, and regain their confidence so they can stay employed and avoid poverty.

I am going to start with a few statistics: 32 percent of Alabama's workforce today is over 50, and by 2022, 35 percent of the U.S. workforce will be 50 or older. In fact, the labor force participation rate for retirement age workers has increased substantially, as you heard from the Senator, and they are now the fastest growing age group in the workforce.

But despite their increasing presence, older workers still face barriers, and age discrimination is a significant challenge. Our legal advocacy unit, AARP Foundation Litigation, is challenging age discrimination in court, and AARP and AARP Foundation believe that it is well past time to update and strengthen the ADEA by passing the bipartisan Protecting Older Workers Against Dis-

crimination Act, sponsored and cosponsored respectively by the Ranking Member and the Chairman of this Committee.

Next I am going to talk about how we help older workers build the skills and regain the confidence through our workforce programs, and you have heard some of that already.

SCSEP, short for the Senior Community Service Employment Program, is authorized by the Older Americans Act and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. We have administered the program for 50 years and currently support over 80 sites across the country, including the state grants for Florida, Washington, and Missouri. In 2017, we placed more than 3,300 participants in jobs. However, at the current funding levels nationally, SCSEP only is able to serve one percent of the eligible population.

Our newest program, Back to Work 50+, was born out of this deep knowledge of the needs and the challenges faced by older workers and our daily experience that there are so many more people that need assistance than we could help with that program.

So we designed Back to Work 50+ to provide training, coaching, and job-seeking tools that are delivered through a trained contact center and a network of local workforce development organizations who host community workshops and then offer the coaching program that you have just heard about.

Each year we respond to at least 20,000 older workers who call our call center, and we connect those callers to local American Job Centers and SCSEP programs, and we mail them copies of this guide that we created called "7 Smart Strategies" that the whole program is based on. We mail that guide to people who are outside of 25 miles of one of our local program sites.

Since 2013, 15,000 older workers attended over 1,200 Smart Strategies Workshops hosted by our local partners. Seventy-three percent of the people who attended were unemployed; 84 percent were low-income and 50+; 32 percent were African American, and 48 percent were white. And we are proud to show that this program is helping workers obtain full-time jobs where 77 percent of the workers who reported employment held full-time jobs with an average wage of \$15 an hour. Back to Work 50+ is a national network with a local focus, and a list of current partners is included in my written testimony.

As you have heard from my colleague Dr. Payne, this is what a very specific Back to Work 50+ Program looks like, and the AARP Foundation's goal is to help low-income 50+ workers by continuing to build alliances with the public workforce system, with community colleges, American Job Centers, and nonprofit workforce development organizations like Jefferson State College, who share a commitment to older workers.

The upcoming WIOA reauthorization will provide Congress with the opportunity to ensure that the job search and workforce development needs of older workers are more effectively addressed.

Much, much more can and needs to be done to ensure that older workers can continue to make valuable contributions to their employers, the economy, and the Nation as a whole. AARP Foundation again thanks the Committee for inviting us to testify, and we look forward to answering any questions that you have.

Senator JONES. Thank you, Ms. Strauss.

Next let us turn to Ms. Sheila Baker of the Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging.

**STATEMENT OF SHEILA BAKER, DIRECTOR OF SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS (SCSEP), MIDDLE ALABAMA AREA AGENCY ON AGING, BIRMINGHAM, AL**

Ms. BAKER. Good afternoon. Again, I am Sheila Baker, and I am employed with Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging, and I am director of the Senior Employment Program that was previously mentioned.

SCSEP, as we call it, is a national program that provides qualified, low-income adults, 55 years and older, with part-time subsidized employment. "Subsidized" means that they are paid, of course, through the program, and they are providing services through host agencies, as we call them, and those host agencies will be either government or nonprofit agencies within the communities. SCSEP is authorized by the Older Americans Act and is administered, as mentioned previously, by the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration and is administered by Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging. We have two programs. We have a state program; that funding comes directly from the State of Alabama Older Adult Services. Also we have a federal program that comes from Senior Service America. But funding from both programs comes through the Department of Labor.

SCSEP was created in 1965, and it is the oldest program that helps low employment individuals aged 55 and older to find employment. We match seniors with host agencies based on their interest in employment. A lot of people are very interested nowadays in receptionist positions. Those positions, of course, require computer training, so what we do is we try to match that participant with the host agency that they can receive that computer training that is needed. Often that is difficult. It is difficult for a few reasons. One reason it is difficult is because a lot of the host agencies we have are government agencies, and they cannot have clearance to use the computers at the worksite.

The other thing is it is difficult because a lot of seniors have never used a computer before, and so it is very difficult if they have not used the computer before. We have done some things to try to work with that or to change that. One of the things that we have done is the program that we provide computer training by partnering with libraries, senior centers, and any other agency in the community that has a computer lab, like a community action agency. And that is by using also a computer program that is called "Generations Online," and it was developed just for seniors who have never used a computer.

SCSEP participants, as I mentioned, must be 55 years and older. They must have a family income of no more than 125 percent of the federal poverty level. Enrollment priority is given to veterans, their qualified spouses, individuals who are 75 years or older, have a disability, have low literacy skills or limited English proficiency, or reside in a rural area, are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Currently, M4A has a waiting list for this program of 350+ participants in our six-county area.

M4A, however, is committed to making it possible for low-income and other disadvantaged adults participate fully to determine their own future and the future of their communities. M4A provides opportunities to low-income participants, as I stated, in six counties, which are Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, Shelby, Walker, and Jefferson counties. Participants not only receive training at their host agency but can attend computer classes, as I mentioned, at various locations.

Some of the numbers that I have is that 32 percent are 65 years and older; 13 percent are 70 years or older; 65 percent of the participants are women; 49 percent of those women are racial or ethnic minority; 20 percent of those have at least one disability; 43 percent or more have some college; 39 percent have high school; 18 percent do not have high school; and 13 percent are veterans; 28 percent live in rural areas. M4A currently has 17 federal slots and 12 state slots. We often over-enroll and are looking to find jobs all the time. So if anyone is interested in hiring participants, please contact us.

Thank you.

Senator JONES. Thank you.

Finally, we will hear from Mr. Doug Dean, vice president of human resources at Children's of Alabama.

**STATEMENT OF DOUG DEAN, CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICER, CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA, BIRMINGHAM, AL**

Mr. DEAN. Thank you. And, Sheila, I will be in touch with you immediately following this.

Thank you. I am Doug Dean. I am chief H.R. officer at Children's of Alabama. Next March will be my 20th year at Children's. We are approaching right at 5,000 employees these days as Alabama's premier and comprehensive provider of pediatric health care services for the children of Alabama and surrounding states.

I cannot miss the opportunity to assure our distinguished Senator that I am with you on what happens at historic Rickwood Field once a year stays at Rickwood Field. However, I do feel it a little cruel on your part, Senator, that you invited me to sit as a witness on this panel on the occasion of my 60th birthday today.

Senator JONES. All right.

[Applause.]

Mr. DEAN. So believe me when I say I have self-interest like maybe some of you in the importance of this issue.

My statement briefly: The fulfillment of our vital mission at Children's of Alabama rises and falls in large part as a result of attracting, developing, and certainly retaining highly skilled talent to deliver safe, quality care to children and their families with excellent outcomes. We are not here to take a straw poll, but I know without asking—if I asked for a show of hand have you had a child, a grandchild, a relative who has been touched by our services, even in the last year, most everyone in the room would likely raise their hand. So we understand how embedded in our community our mission is as a not-for-profit organization.

As it relates to this Special Committee on Aging, which I am cheering on, Senator, and your fine work—and I know I speak for my other human resource executive colleagues in saying that—I

would say in the recent decade, a key focus of our strategy at Children's of Alabama has been to work very hard to understand our workforce demographics. I refer to it as "segmented marketing," if you swim in those waters, that instead of one size fits all, whether it be your customer in retail or my customer, our employees and our prospective employees, it is important to understand everything that makes those segments tick and why they would want to be part of your team, what skills they need, what they are looking for in their quality of work life, and then to do what is not always easy for us when you have got 100 years of habits, mostly good habits, with our management practices, we are having to re-skill ourselves as leaders to customize—and that is a word I like, to customize our workplace practices to recruiting and retention of those defined segments.

So what about the older worker segment of our workforce? Today Children's of Alabama workforce is comprised of 25 percent boomers—and we are actually starting to break that into two parts: the newer boomers, which are in their 50's, and we have a significant—that is 15 percent in our case; ten percent of our workforce are the older boomers that are 60+.

I am proud to report that our own CEO—I already 'fessed' up as to the milestone I hit today, but our CEO, the legendary leader in Birmingham, Mike Warren, would not mind me saying that he is pushing 70, Suzanne, if he has not already arrived, and you would not be able to tell. He runs circles around the rest of us in terms of energy and talent and drive.

So today we are 25 percent boomers, baby boomers, that is the 53 to 70 age band; 26 percent Gen X, 36 to 52 age band; and clearly on the rise, in our case, of necessity, we are an astounding 49 percent millennials running Children's of Alabama. It is kind of shocking if you walk the halls in our beautiful new facility, Benjamin Russell Hospital for Children, our talented staff in some cases do not look like they are too many years past being children themselves. But not to worry. Because we work in teams and we are very conscious and deliberate about proving competencies of the staff, mixing teams based on age, I think very pertinent to today's discussion, so that you always have a mentor, you have an experienced veteran team member, for example, in the case of a staff nurse, we really love it if we have a 15 to 20 plus year tenured staff nurse who has seen it all.

It is not uncommon at all, probably happens every week, that a board-certified physician is working with a child, and very experienced physicians, and on occasion an experienced nurse will say, "That is not what I see going on here," and that physician will trust the nurse and dig a little farther, and sure enough, experience trumps diagnostics and medical training. So the important message is, in our case—and I suspect in most every industry and company—it really benefits you from a business and customer and outcomes point of view to have a mix of skill and age and experience.

I guess I would close by saying I do not think we have scratched the surface necessarily as an industry in HR, a profession, in understanding the business, the tremendous business value of having age diversity across the whole spectrum in your workforce. And we

could talk about other important forms of diversity, but today's subject relates to age.

I will close by saying that the legendary Florida State football coach, Bobby Bowden, coached there I think well into his 70's, and late in his career, he became tired of media asking him, "Have you thought about retiring?" And he finally said, quoted a legendary quote, response, "You know, I am not really in a hurry to retire because after that there is only one more big event in life."

[Laughter.]

Mr. DEAN. So we embrace having workers at every age. We do not encourage people to retire. We let them have their hands on the wheel related to that. We have worked very hard at up-skilling people and redirecting careers, mid-career people want to be part of the health care mission like ours. And I just again thank my fellow witnesses and Senator Jones and this Committee on Aging for the opportunity to speak today.

Senator JONES. Great. Thank you.

Now, I will ask some questions, but if anybody wants to chime in with any answers, please feel free. We can have as much of a dialog as we need. I have got some specifics here, but there may be things that you all want to say.

I want to first ask Ms. Strauss, it is no secret that women generally are disproportionately affected by a lot of issues in the workplace, including age discrimination and unemployment. The AARP Foundation introduced the Women's Economic Stability Initiative, WESI, to provide targeted support for older women. Older women obviously get kind of a double whammy. They are older and they are women.

So what prompted AARP to develop the new initiative? And what do you think contributes to the gender employment gap? And can Congress do anything to help? Loaded questions.

Ms. STRAUSS. Lots of questions. Thank you, Senator.

Well, the research that you mentioned is the reason that we ended up working on—focusing on the issue of older women. It is widely known that 75 percent of the elderly poor are women and women live longer. So when we looked at how we were going to address poverty, we moved up the age ladder, and we said, OK, we are going to look at how do we help women stay employed for as long as they need to. And then we applied for a grant from the Corporation for National Community Service that allowed us to be able to host a program where we were able to actually pilot the vision that we had, which was not just looking at training or one piece of the puzzle for job candidates, but really looking at the whole experience.

One of the things that we know we are pretty good at is marketing and communications and finding women, finding people and bringing them out and having them step forward so they can take advantage of the services that are available. So the design that we tested with the different community colleges was—well, we called it "end-to-end customer experience." It started with the Back to Work 50+ title named for the program nationally, and then using AARP's megaphone to say come here, find us, and then they could call, very quickly get connected, and then we had great partners who helped us create the models that included the things that we

know older adults need, individual time to have individual coaching where they are looking at their skills, looking at their interests, seeing how that matches with the job market, and then working through a little bit of their own frustrations around why they are not employed, and then understanding how to navigate the process and build their skills.

What can Congress do? Well, I think I pointed to two things in my testimony that I will reflect back to. The first is the Senior Community Service Employment Program is really important for older women, and we have gone through a couple of years now where that has been slated for elimination, and we are completely and absolutely opposed to that, and we would hope that you would be as well.

The second thing I would say is the Workforce Investment Act and the public workforce system is ready to and interested in serving older workers, and we have been spending the last five years working with community colleges and American Job Centers to create tools and resources that they can easily utilize, be able to adjust their current staffing to be able to focus on this population and do it a little bit differently, and speak with employers in their communities to help them understand how age discrimination or ageism is happening in their own companies. So Congress can help us by helping to raise awareness within the Department of Labor and the public workforce system on behalf of this population and supporting—continuing to support SCSEP.

Senator JONES. Great. Thank you.

Dr. Payne, you administer Jefferson State's WESI Program. Have you found any particular solutions or strategies to be the most effective in supporting older female workers?

Dr. PAYNE. We definitely have found that there are some strategies that work more than others. One of the strategies that we really love is the individual and the group coaching. With the individual coaching, as Lori says, it gives us an opportunity to talk one on one with the job candidate to figure out what their hard skills and soft skills are.

So one of the things we found is our Back to Work 50+ candidates are more likely to shortchange themselves in regards to how valuable life experience is. Even if they have never worked or they have not received a paycheck in the last couple years, it does not mean that they have not utilized soft skills. And we all know how valuable those soft skills are, just being able to communicate, being able to showcase those listening skills.

Also, with the group coaching, we found that that is an indicator for success, again, because they are able to tell their stories to one another. We have had Back to Work 50+ candidates that have gone on to become fast friends. They have gone to each other's houses. And so we meet candidates sometimes that they may be self-supporting; they may be empty nesters; everybody may have passed away. And so they feel isolated. So with that group coaching, it supplements the individual because we can do one-on-one, but the group coaching, they get to make connections with other individuals and hear stories that are similar to theirs, and there is strength in unity.

Senator JONES. Great. Again, if anybody wants to add anything, just let me know.

I would like to ask Ms. Dorsey-Collins, first of all, I am really pleased that you enrolled in the Certified Production Technician because I hear from Alabama's auto manufacturers all the time about the need for skilled workers, so that is great. I am hoping that we are going to expand that a good bit as well.

You mentioned you kind of found out about the CPT program by accident. Tell us a couple things. What do you think we might do to get that word out a little bit better? And once you saw it, how did you decide that might be a good fit for you?

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. Well, when I stumbled across the program, I was very excited that there was something available for 50+ candidates. And I think to give the program more awareness is increased advertising, maybe TV, radio, flyers, incentives, meet-and-greets, or just especially social media. But the program, I am so ecstatic that it is available for people like me and that can allow me to just—like Dr. Payne said, when you do not realize about your soft skills, maybe you are taking care of an elderly person and not knowing that that could be a soft skill that you could use and be qualified for a position in the workplace that you never just thought that, you know, you would be available to do. But that is pretty much it.

Senator JONES. OK. Ms. Baker, and maybe, Dr. Payne, you would want to weigh in on this as well, how does the Back to Work 50+ Program and the SCSEP program help participants—how do they help determine what training and employment opportunities to pursue? And do you partner with businesses and industries in the area to help find or locate those participants and kind of identify the opportunities that are out there?

Ms. BAKER. There are some partnerships with business and industry, but usually they are going to be the government agencies and the nonprofits. We can also profit by way of on-the-job training, which means that we will pay—if it is not a nonprofit agency, we can ask for—have a situation where we can pay the wage of that person providing that there is an opportunity for that person to be hired at the end of the OJT.

What was the first part of your question, please?

Senator JONES. The first part was, you know, how do you help them, direct them to the areas that they are interested in and the opportunities that are out there?

Ms. BAKER. And we do that by doing a good assessment. We have to do an initial assessment and an initial individual employment plan. And then sometimes it may change what that person wants to do. So what we do is we will go in and we will do a reassessment every six months and update the individual employment plan.

Also, in between that, sometimes a participant, we may change what we call their "host agency," and if we change their host agency, we also need to do another reassessment because we always want to make sure that we are setting them up to succeed and not fail by making sure that we are finding all of the skills that they have, the skills that they need to develop in working with us.

Senator JONES. All right. Dr. Payne, do you want to add anything to that?



Dr. PAYNE. I will. There are a couple of different things that we do. About 80 percent of our candidates wants to do something administrative, and we know from hearing from Lori that sometimes those PC skills, those technology skills are lacking. So we use a Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment, so we assess everybody's basic computer skills. Individuals, we are looking at a numerical value, but I am a qualitative person, so I am also concerned with what does the wording say. And we are trying to ascertain who could benefit from a basic computer skills course.

Another partnership that we have is with the college's Workforce Development Program that is directed by Kay Potter, who is here in the crowd. Kay does a wonderful job of working with industries to develop these short certificate training programs that are aligned with in-demand jobs. So we use an assessment called the "Virtual Career Network" to give our Back to Work 50+ candidates an assessment that looks at their interests and also looks at what hard skills and soft skills they have. And we see if they are aligned with in-demand jobs that are offered through training programs in our workforce development.

If we have someone that has an interest that may not necessarily be in demand, then we are all about making sure they have information about the outlook of that career path and about the potential career trajectory, because we are also not about denying an individual if they have had a dream for 30, 40 years to work in a certain career path. So, primarily, we do the one-on-one coaching. Again, because I am qualitative, we supplement that with a basic computer skills assessment to identify those technical deficiencies, and we also rely on the Virtual Career Network, and we really on an assessment called "16Personalities," and Virtual Career Network and 16Personalities are both free and available for anyone to use. And the 16Personalities assessment just tells us what type of leader or non-leader a candidate is, and we talk about how that applies to the work setting that they envision themselves in.

The second part of your question is between Kay's area, workforce development, and the Career Center, we are talking with human resources personnel, and we are trying to find out what are their employment needs, and then we are trying to find the best way to train our Back to Work 50+ candidates to meet those needs.

The partnership we have with the Department of Labor has also been valuable because that gives us access to human resources personnel that we may not have had the opportunity to meet so that we can highlight both the Back to Work 50+ program and highlight diversity among the candidates that participate.

Senator JONES. Great. Thank you.

Mr. Dean, obviously older workers face really unique challenges in the workforce, including managing their own health problems, juggling caregiver demands with their busy work schedules. What is it that employers, and if Children's has anything unique, can do to empower workers and help them thrive in the face of such challenges?

Mr. DEAN. I mentioned in my opening statement the notion of instead of workplace policies that are one size fits all, if you will, that instead they recognize that the real goal is to attract and secure

and retain the talent to run your organization, and that is going to cut across generations and a whole diverse array of worker profiles. Then it becomes really important to really push and insist on the part of your managers and even in your workplace policies, which I am one of the owners of, flexibility. That is a critical word.

Sometimes we find we will have a manager, well intending, who just finds it more convenient or easier to have—you know, to want 40-hour full-time workers almost no matter what. And you have conversations with them, and usually we are successful, our H.R. consultants, at winning them over that you have got—we have a 65-year-old talented worker who really knows their way around, knows our health system, knows what we do, is great at a job, is well liked by their team members, but they really either are not—no longer want to work 40 hours a week or in many cases are not able to, the Senator's point about the demands of often aging parents and so many other issues.

Oh, by the way, the growing number of grandparents who are still parenting children themselves, you just thought your parenting was finished.

So we really push flexibility. It is a win if we keep any of our talent online, whether that is a 10-hour-a-week schedule, an on-call schedule. We have, amazingly, some workers that really have officially retired and they love the freedom to do what they want, but they loved our organization so much, they really love the idea of they have this skill and they are willing to be on call. So if we have someone out on maternity leave or whatever it may be, we can call them, and they are willing to come work for a start-and-finish, a sunset period.

There are so many more examples that given our limited time we cannot go into, but I think it is all about developing—listening to and having a dialog with workers at every segment, and particularly related to today, workers over 50+, and find out what do they want. What would it take for you to stay in our health system longer? And as I look at our inflow of millennial workers, it is only going to grow, and the outflow of boomers who plan to retire, it is kind of an alarming question I do not have the answer to yet. Can we, in fact, count on our millennials to put in 20-plus-year careers at the same organization? If the answer to that is no, then we have got a lot of work to do in a short period of time, Senator.

Senator JONES. All right. Thank you.

Ms. Strauss, I want to go back to you real quick, because obviously we are hearing what a great program this is at Jefferson State. I know there are other—how many are there around the country like this? Like 20-something maybe?

Ms. STRAUSS. Yes, I think so. Right now we have 16 sites and we have 26 locations.

Senator JONES. OK. I am wondering, what can we do? We have somebody else—I mean, this is Jefferson State Junior College. We have got a really great junior college system in Alabama. If other sites in Alabama would like to do this, what would be the quick steps that they could take to try to partner with AARP and get one of these things going?

Ms. STRAUSS. Well, that is a beautiful question, Senator. It is exactly what we are doing right now. So this year we started to ex-

pand Back to Work 50+ through strategic partnerships that we call “non-grant partnerships.” Our startup includes grant funding, but now we have created a turnkey version of the program so that it is literally—the first step is an e-mail to me to say that people are interested, and then we explain how to start, and we give them access to a Web site that has our playbook and our materials. They sign a non-financial letter of agreement with us, and we start. And this is something AARP Foundation is committed to, to provide the infrastructure and the assets.

You mentioned earlier the importance of outreach. We have created marketing materials that were created based on what we hear older workers need to hear, like messages like, “You have the experience, now regain the confidence. Call this 1-800 number to get started.” Then they call a 1-800 number, they register for a workshop, and they start the program.

So an e-mail to me, and we have a processing—we are really looking to grow right now, so thank you.

Senator JONES. All right. Well, I will tell you what we are going to do. This lady here, Ms. Campbell, she will send out something to all our junior colleges, she and Rebecca Howard, who is my education person, to try to get this done.

Ms. STRAUSS. Excellent.

Senator JONES. At least to get the word out from our office. OK?

Ms. STRAUSS. Thank you so much.

Senator JONES. Thank you very much.

So, Ms. Dorsey-Collins, back to you. You are selling cemetery lots now.

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. Yes.

Senator JONES. But you are certified. You finished that technician. What are your next steps? What are you hoping for?

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. My next step is to finish the Production Certification Program and hopefully to gain employment with one of the manufacturing companies locally.

Senator JONES. One of the automobile manufacturing companies?

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. Yes.

Senator JONES. That is Montgomery or Tuscaloosa?

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. Yes.

Senator JONES. You are good with that?

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. I am good with that.

Senator JONES. Ready to move?

Ms. DORSEY-COLLINS. I am ready to move.

Senator JONES. Just out of curiosity, with some of the folks, Dr. Payne, Ms. Baker, do you see that older folks that you get are willing to relocate on occasion if they need to?

Ms. BAKER. On occasion, yes. The biggest issues that I have seen are seniors who live in the rural areas and driving long distances, because most of those employment opportunities are going to be in the municipalities, and if you live in—

Senator JONES. You can live in a lot of places in Alabama. Just pick one.

Ms. BAKER. Rural Alabama does not want to drive into municipalities, so that is the issue that we have, transportation.

Senator JONES. Is there a way somehow to focus on our rural areas? We are trying to do a lot with, you know, the rural parts

of the state. Is there a way to kind of identify those areas that we might can get into? Or is it just kind of—not luck of the draw, but—

Ms. BAKER. I think we can identify them, yes. Whether we can change that desire for those people to drive into municipalities, that is not going to happen readily.

In terms of employment, I think what we need to do is identify a way to get employers to understand that these are very good and valuable workers, and I think as you mentioned earlier that sometimes you have your employees working part-time instead of full-time. Most seniors are looking for part-time employment, and what I have tried to impress upon some individuals or industries that I have spoken with is that sometimes that can help you because if you hire two people part-time, then you are usually saving money with benefits, because most seniors already have insurance so they are not looking for insurance, and they are really not that concerned about vacation and sick days.

Senator JONES. Right. So one of the things we need to try to do is maybe identify employers in these rural areas so they do not have to drive as far.

Ms. BAKER. Yes.

Senator JONES. That kind of leads into another area where I wanted to go, and that is—oh, I am sorry.

Dr. PAYNE. I am sorry, Senator Jones. I wanted to piggyback off of what you were asking.

Senator JONES. Sure.

Dr. PAYNE. In regards to our Back to Work 50+ candidates, on occasion we get individuals that are in a position to pick up and move. But since 90 percent of the individuals who come to Back to Work 50+ are underemployed or not employed, they are not in a position to pick up and move.

So one of the things that we have done in regards to the MSSC Automotive Initiative is we have also looked at industries that need Certified Production Technicians that are not necessarily in a rural area. So we have looked at Autocar, we have looked at LTEC, because we realize that for some individuals transportation may be an issue.

For us at our Jefferson campus, we do have the bus that comes right on campus, so we are more likely to get candidates there that have issues with transportation. So I will say that is one of the things that we have worked on, forming partnerships with entities that may have either a ride-share program—so we work with a couple of different banks that are downtown that have a ride-share at certain peak times of the year, and so our Back to Work 50+ candidates have been able to take advantage of that, and also look at industries that are closer to where they live so it would not be such a hardship for them to get there.

Senator JONES. OK. Great. Well, that kind of leads in: What are you guys seeing in terms of regional trends or differences? Is there something unique to Alabama that, you know, you have seen for older Alabamans versus another area of the country? There may or may not be. I am just asking.

Dr. PAYNE. Well, piggybacking off what Ms. Baker said again, lack of transportation has been an issue. So in some of our counter-

parts—and Lori can attest to this—that are in larger areas where the public transportation system is more widely used, they can branch out more, candidates can branch out more for training programs. They can branch out more for employment. So one of the issues that our 50+ candidates are facing and other individuals are facing is that our public transportation system is not as strong as it should be.

I will say that with our Back to Work 50+ candidates, something that has been more unique is with the group coaching session and them forming partnerships. We have had Back to Work 50+ candidates that have picked up their friends that they have met in the 7 Smart Strategies Workshop, they have picked up their new friend that they have met in a coaching session, and they have done ride-share on their own. And so part of the Back to Work 50+ model is that we are providing about 90 percent of the services, but the other ten percent is the candidates getting to know each other, to feel each other out, and forming those relationships that we want to transcend the program but to last 10, 15 years after they were Back to Work 50+ participants. And when we are talking to our counterparts that are running Back to Work 50+ Programs, we are seeing some of those relationships. But I think because of the transportation issue, we have seen that a little bit stronger in Alabama.

Senator JONES. Great.

Ms. STRAUSS. I am going to piggyback on what Dr. Payne said. One of the things that we see nationally that is unique about what is happening here in Birmingham is job candidates in Birmingham, they want training. And so the grant that we provide to Jefferson State through the Federal Corporation for National and Community Service they are using for training and scholarships, and that is very—that is unique and important because it is not available to older adults in general.

One of the age discrimination issues that we always focus on is the fact that people tend not to have access to training in their workplace as they age, and there are some misperceptions or assumptions that employers make that older workers either are not interested or they should be invested in, which then causes, when they become unemployed, then they are behind the eight ball, and then they are trying to figure out how to get access to training. So the interest in training in this location is huge compared to other places, and the program that Dr. Payne and Kay Potter have created builds on that interest, and so they have a lot more people in training and are moving forward in occupational skills than other places in the country.

Senator JONES. Good. Mr. Dean, that kind of leads into something I wanted to ask you. Correct me if I am wrong, but it seems to me that Children's commitment to diversity with an older population of workforce is really kind of two-fold. One, you may have people that kind of grow with you, age with you, which requires that same level of training to keep them, especially in the health care delivery field. But is there also a component of attracting those older workers as well that may be new to the field? So talk about that commitment and what Children's does to maintain both of those?

Mr. DEAN. A powerful question. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on that. I guess we are uniquely relevant to this discussion in this respect, and that is that, of course, we are proud of this, but it presents unique business opportunities and challenges that we have. It is really common for talented workers to come to work at Children's of Alabama either immediately after their education or skills they acquire, however they do, certifications, nursing school, and never leave Children's of Alabama until they retire. And in other cases they may work with us 10, 15 years, be at home with children for a while, return to the workforce, go to other companies for opportunities. And every two weeks, when I welcome our new employees at orientation, I ask—and I put them at ease, and I am not calling them out to embarrass them, but just to celebrate. Invariably, we have half a dozen who are rehires, so they come back for a second tour of duty.

So if you ask any H.R. executive how they feel about retaining talent, the answer you are going to get—and I think it is almost always sincere—is we love it if we have full career staff that will be part of our company. But we are also realistic that it is a very mobile world. We love our Millennial workers, but we are also realistic that for different big societal reasons, developmental generational reasons, they may view the world differently than our parents or grandparents did in terms of 30 years at the same company. And that is not necessarily bad. Maybe they are the smart ones, that they are really moving their career like free agents where the opportunity is. So we have that.

I will give you one example, and it is becoming a growing example, of how we look outside the company, Senator, and have instances in which we can be part of changing the career direction of someone. His name is Bobby, and it is pretty cool to talk about a staff nurse that is male because that has been a unique challenge for every hospital. It is a heavily female-dominated career track.

Bobby came to me, he was kind of referred to me, and he was in a sales and service role, a 48-year-old gentleman, and he just really had an interest in a nursing career. And I gave him some shadowing experiences, and fortunately, our nursing management is happy to do that if there is promise there. He did his part, applied at Jefferson State for nursing school, completed it, passed the boards, and here is mid-career, and he is in our emergency department, one of the most valued nurses that they have hired. And he never dreamed he would be in a nursing career even at age 45.

Now, those are happening organically right now. What I think we should work more aggressively at, maybe other companies should, is to partner with higher education and institutions who can help us. They are better at training skills. The 4-year educational track is not necessarily for everyone. There is growing legitimate debate over the return on investment with the cost of education. So where we see talented, capable people and we can more rapidly up-skill them and they are ready to go to work, and I think that is going to become a much more prevalent opportunity for us.

Senator JONES. Great. So we are kind of winding down with the official phase. I want to end with two things: one, a question about age discrimination; and then just also if anybody would like to add anything that we have not covered, feel free to do that. But, unfor-

tunately, studies show that age discrimination remains a significant issue. Often we think of discrimination in terms of race and religion and gender, but clearly age discrimination is a significant problem affecting older adults in our workforce.

Throughout your work, have you identified any solutions for addressing age discrimination other than the obvious that we have talked about here—which, quite frankly, is a culture, a changing culture, which I think you are all promoting and I applaud. That may be the most significant thing. Are there other issues—I know there are some things pending in Congress that we might be able to do that we want to look at. Anything about that? And I would also like as part of this wrap-up, if anybody wants to just throw out anything that we have not covered by way of questions, feel free to. We have got a few more minutes before we kind of close out and open it up to the audience. So discrimination and just general topics.

Dr. PAYNE. One of the things that we have noticed is that a couple of the big names have started taking the date of birth off of the employment application. So Regents Bank is one of the employers that we work with for our Back to Work 50+ candidates, and they no longer have your date of birth on their employment application. So they will not know how old you are until you actually show up for the interview. So that may be a potential solution as more companies see how Regents Bank fares and how other entities fare if they want to remove that from the application.

Senator JONES. That is an interesting concept, kind of the same thing with people who have a prior criminal conviction, they have removed that from some of those things, too.

Yes, Lori?

Ms. STRAUSS. I will just add that we are in a really unique time right now with very low unemployment. Companies are pretty desperate for talent, and they are coming to us and asking for help to recruit, to find, recruit, and train older workers. And AARP has a set of resources right now, [AARP.org/employers](http://AARP.org/employers), that has really simple things for H.R. departments to be able to use to help their team members or the managers just learn a little bit about what misconceptions they might have. We also talk with employers about changing their recruitment materials so that they include multi-generational images, changing their recruitment strategies so that they are not always focusing on places where just younger workers might be, and to reach out to programs like SCSEP and Back to Work 50+ resourcing partners.

Senator JONES. OK.

Ms. BAKER. I would just like to add to that. One of the things that SCSEP does is—because we really have some great talent with the SCSEP participants. We encourage them and we help them to build a functional resume versus a chronological resume, because I feel—and it has been proven—that if they can get in the door, they can sell themselves. But they must get in the door without what it states on the resume.

Senator JONES. Good. Anybody else want to add anything before we close out? Mr. Dean?

Mr. DEAN. It is an important subject, and, you know, it would be normal, I guess, to assume that if you ask a question about em-

ployment and legal risk to an H.R. leader, then we are going to think in terms of how to avoid a lawsuit. But to me that is the bare minimum, not a very inspiring way to view this important question. And I think organizations need to—we need to apply some peer pressure, and I think it is already happening, to your point, Lori, of necessity. There is not a talent pool out there. When I need talent, by and large, and every other company, we are stealing it from each other. And so the business necessity and urgency is there in case there are any vestiges of age discrimination that go on in the hiring practices of a manager or a company to rethink that and prove to yourself that you are not by bringing in that supply of talent, and I think just the presence of it without talking about it and preaching about it necessarily, although that does not hurt either, and setting the tone at the top can radically change that. We do not have that difficulty because many of us in important leadership positions are hardly junior in terms of age ourselves, and so more and more there is a vested interest to have a very balanced workforce in terms of age demographics.

Senator JONES. All right. Anybody? One more OK.

Ms. BAKER. One more thing, which is skills-based hiring practices are a promising practice that is being supported and promoted by Skillful and the Markle Foundation. And when employers use skills-based hiring practices, they take away implicit bias. And when employers are looking at skills alone, older workers tend to rise to the top because they have the experience and they have the background. And so that is a promising practice that we are partnering with that we think is really important for employers to take advantage of.

Senator JONES. Great. Well, thank you all, to all of our witnesses. You were just an outstanding panel today.

I also want to thank Jefferson State for also allowing us to be here today and providing the accommodations. We really appreciate the hospitality. Also to the staff here who helped put this thing together, we as Senators cannot function without this incredible staff that we have.

Our Committee members will have until Monday, December 10th, to submit additional questions for the record, so you may be receiving some additional questions.

Finally, over here on the side, we have a Committee pamphlet called "America's Aging Workforce." If you would like to take a look at some of the work that the Committee has done and some of the findings, please feel free to pick that up.

So, with that, I will adjourn the hearing. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 2:35 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]



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## **APPENDIX**

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**Prepared Witness Statements**

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**Statement of Dr. Tamara Payne  
Director of Career and Learning Services  
Jefferson State Community College**

Good Afternoon Senator Jones and other members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging field hearing, "Back to Work: Empowering Alabama's Aging Workforce.

I am honored to speak with you today regarding the BACK TO WORK 50+ Program at Jefferson State Community College and the unique needs of job candidates that are 50 and older. Jefferson State Community College has been a part of AARP Foundation's BACK TO WORK 50+ Network since mid-2014.

Major Components of BACK TO WORK 50+

- 7 Smart Strategies Workshop that includes an analysis of the 7 effective habits for 50+ job seekers
  - Targeted Job Search
    - The Importance of Keyword Searches
    - Interests VS Skills
    - Requirements VS Preferred Criteria
  - Create Personal Marketing Tools to Impress Employers
    - Resume and Cover Letter Development
    - Embedding Keywords into Your Resume
  - Conquering the Job Application and Interview Process
    - How to Complete an Online Application
    - How to Set Up Email Accounts
  - Get New Work Experiences and Skills
    - Transitional Employment
    - Part-time Employment
    - Volunteer Opportunities
  - Meet People Who Know People
    - Career Fairs
    - Career Centers
    - Temporary Agencies
  - Connect With Organizations That Find Jobs for Employers
  - Take Time to Focus on Yourself and Stay Strong
    - YMCA Silver Sneakers or East Pinson Valley Recreation Center
    - Eastern Mental Health Authority
    - Family Guidance Center
    - Chilton Shelby Mental Health Authority
    - Finances 50+

Other Program Components:

- Individual and Group Coaching
- Computer skills assessment and training (basic computer, Basic Word and Basic Excel are offered to all participants-technology deficits have been identified as a barrier to employment for 50+ job seekers with no skills, limited skills, or out of date skills ( <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology/info-2018/technology-training-for-older-adults.html>; <https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/planning-to-retire/2012/05/18/why-older-workers-cant-get-hired>)
- Scholarships for non-credit fast track training programs based on in-demand jobs leading to industry certification(s)
- Job readiness skills (working on soft skills) and interview preparation
- Job placement assistance (direct referrals and leads)

BACK TO WORK 50+: Women's Economic Stability Initiative (WESI)

After success with the BACK TO WORK 50+ Program, Jefferson State Community College enhanced our partnership with AARP Foundation by becoming a BACK TO WORK 50+ WESI Partner. WESI focuses on women ages 50 and older. Earlier we heard testimony regarding the national statistics on unemployment for women ages 50 and older. Here is are figures exclusive to Alabama. As of 2018, 16.9% of women in Alabama ages 60-64 are underemployed. Per data from October 2018, women ages 55-64 spend over 30 weeks being unemployed when compared to the average of 10 weeks for women ages 20-24. Jefferson State's selection as a WESI Partner was an indicator of our Success with the Classic Back To Work Program and hinged upon the need of a program expressly for women ages 50+ in Alabama, taking into account their distinctive needs to improve their employability and economic stability.

Outcomes

Since June 2014, 853 individuals have attended a 7 Smart Strategies Workshop. 313 individuals received individual and group coaching. 179 50+ candidates have been hired with an average wage of \$13 per hour.

Indicators for Success

- Suggestions a cohort coaching model where participants learn from the coaches and from one another
- Embedding basic and intermediate computer skills into a soft skills curriculum
- Look at short term, industry in-demand driven programs
- Mock interviews using local staffing agencies and HR personnel
- Highlight success stories and share with participants, employers, and local leaders

- Educate local employers on the innate skills that 50+ job candidates bring to the table
- Assist 50+ job seekers with highlighting their hard and soft skills

#### Local Partnerships/Regional Initiatives

- Longstanding partnership with the Alabama Department of Labor to accept referrals for BACK TO WORK 50+ and to provide referrals to ADOL for WIOA
- ALDOL representative housed at the Jefferson (Carson Road Campus) with ALDOL having representation at the Shelby Campus
- Mercedes Auto Initiative-focus on Ready to Work (Soft Skills and Industry Driven) and MSSC Certified Production Technician and Certified Logistics Technician
- Jefferson State Community College has partnered with Positive Maturity/Aware, the Middle Alabama Area on Aging, Central Six, and many other non-profits to accept referrals into the BACK TO WORK 50+ Program.
- Partnership with JSCC Adult Education to refer 50+ candidates that lack high school diploma or GED
- Partnership with Career Pathways for scholarships for in-demand credentials that are stackable and correlate to credit -based programs

#### Other JSCC Initiatives

- DOL Grant done in partnership with Generation and AAPR Foundation to work with displaced workers ages 40 and older
- New Options Program provides scholarship, book loan, tutoring, and wrap around services for non-traditional students, including older returning students

#### Success Story-Video

<https://vimeo.com/aarpbroadcast/review/292408975/16e5261c1a>

**Statement of Montina Dorsey-Collins, a Back to Work 50+ Participant**

My name is Montina Dorsey-Collins. I have been through the Back to Work 50+ Program at Jefferson State Community College and I cannot say enough good things about it! My experience has been exceptional. From excellent life coaching, learning new skills and wonderful support, my Back to Work 50+ involvement has taught me that I am not alone in my search for a better job.

I accidentally found the program by going to the state employment office located in the One Stop Career Center on campus. They recommended the program to me and I went to the information session where I learned about the program and strategies for gaining employment for people over 50. Finding a job is so different than it was when I first started working.

My Back to Work 50+ coaching sessions were invaluable. We talked about the difficulties of finding new/better employment for people over 50. The coaching helped me see the value in myself and the many skills that I already possess.

The program has offered me fantastic technical skills and refresher skills. The program led me to Ready to Work and now I am in the Certified Production Technician program. These classes have taught me technology basics, workplace behaviors, resume building and has taught me how find and apply for jobs online. My Certified Production Technician classes are preparing me for a career in the automotive manufacturing industry and I am looking forward to a career change because of my new skills.

And lastly, I cannot say enough about the Back to Work 50+ staff. I currently work selling cemetery plots and headstones. My current job has no advancement opportunities and my income is solely based on sales. My coaches have taken the time to have one on one sessions with me to discuss my needs and where I want my career to go from here. They have helped me see the need for certification training and how it can help my career objectives.

I am grateful to have found such a great opportunity through the Back to Work 50+ program. I know it has helped me and many others as well.



**TESTIMONY OF  
LORI STRAUSS, MANAGER OF WORKFORCE PROGRAMS  
AARP FOUNDATION**

**SUBMITTED TO THE**

**U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING  
FIELD HEARING  
AT  
JEFFERSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, SHELBY CAMPUS**

**ON**

**BACK TO WORK: EMPOWERING ALABAMA'S AGING WORKFORCE**

**November 30, 2018**



Senator Jones and Members of the Committee, AARP Foundation thanks you for inviting us to testify at today's hearing to discuss how we can empower and equip older workers to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging workforce. With nearly 38 million members nationwide, and more than 440,000 members in Alabama, AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. I am Lori Strauss, the Workforce Programs Manager for AARP Foundation. AARP Foundation works to end senior poverty by helping vulnerable older adults build economic opportunity and social connectedness. As AARP's charitable affiliate, we serve AARP members and nonmembers alike.

The workforce, along with the population at large, is aging. Thirty-five percent of the U.S. workforce will be age 50 or older by 2022,<sup>1</sup> and older workers 50+ already make up about one-third (32%) of Alabama's workforce.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the labor force participation rate for *retirement-age* workers has increased substantially, and they are now the fastest growing age group in the workforce. Between 2014 and 2024, the number of workers ages 65-74 is expected to grow by 4.5%, and the number of workers 75 and older is expected to grow by 6.4%, compared to, for example, a growth rate of about 1% for workers 25-44.<sup>3</sup> Ideally, employer practices and public policies can maximize older workers' choices to work if they need or want to or to retire with economic security; most hope to keep working or combine work with retirement.

#### Age Discrimination Remains a Significant Challenge for Older Workers

Despite their increasing presence in the workforce, older workers still face barriers. In particular, according to AARP's new survey of workers 45 and older, about six in 10 report that they've seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace; of this group, 91% say that age discrimination is common.<sup>4</sup> Older workers are less likely to become unemployed than younger workers, but once jobless, older workers experience far longer spells of unemployment than younger workers, and age discrimination is likely the main reason why.

Age discrimination in hiring is the most difficult form of discrimination to detect and prove. Yet, employers are engaging in a number of increasingly blatant, age-related practices that directly or indirectly discriminate against older workers, such as:

- Help wanted ads that specify a requirement for "digital natives" or a *maximum* number of years of experience (e.g., no more than 10 years);
- Recruitment efforts for entry-level positions that are limited to college campuses and require a college-affiliated email address in order to apply;
- The use of algorithms and "big data" for to screen out older applicants, or even prevent older jobseekers from seeing ads for job postings in the first place;<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aon Hewitt, *A Business Case for Workers Age 50+: A Look at the Value of Experience* 18 (AARP, 2015), at [https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys\\_statistics/general/2015/business-case-workers-age-50plus.doi.10.26419%2Fres.00100.001.pdf](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/general/2015/business-case-workers-age-50plus.doi.10.26419%2Fres.00100.001.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *AARP State Fact Sheet: Alabama* (AARP, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> See M. Toossi & E. Torpey, *Older workers: Labor force trends and career options*, Chart 2 (May 2017), at <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2017/article/older-workers.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> R. Perron, *The Value of Experience: Age Discrimination Against Older Workers Persists* 3-4 (2018), at [https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys\\_statistics/econ/2018/value-of-experience-age-discrimination-highlights.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00177.002.pdf](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/econ/2018/value-of-experience-age-discrimination-highlights.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00177.002.pdf) [hereinafter *VOE Survey*].

<sup>5</sup> J. Angwin, N. Scheiber, *et al.*, "Facebook Job Ads Raise Concerns about Age Discrimination," *N.Y. Times* (Dec. 20, 2017), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/20/business/facebook-job-ads.html>.

- Online job applications that have drop-down menus that stop at dates that block older workers from applying, or that deter older applicants by asking for date of birth.

AARP Foundation Litigation, our legal advocacy unit, is challenging several of these practices in court. Unfortunately, over the years, the courts have failed to interpret the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) as a remedial civil rights statute; instead, courts have too often narrowly interpreted its protections and broadly construed its exceptions.

AARP and AARP Foundation believe that it is well past time to update and strengthen the ADEA so that it can respond to the challenges facing today's older workers in today's workplace. An excellent first step to restoring a level playing field for older workers would be for Congress to pass the bipartisan Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act (POWADA, S. 443), sponsored and cosponsored respectively by the Ranking Member and Chairman of this Committee. More than 90% agree of older workers that older Americans should be protected from age discrimination *just as strongly* as they are protected from discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin or religion.<sup>6</sup> Congress should pass this bill as soon as possible.

#### **The Need and Demand for Workforce Programs Serving Older Workers Is Growing**

Unemployed workers age 50 and older experience the longest spells of joblessness and constitute the majority of the long-term unemployed. In addition to overcoming hiring discrimination, finding and keeping a job today requires new and varied skills, especially related to technology and computer literacy — skills that displaced older workers don't always have or may not feel confident about. With record low unemployment and other labor force challenges, employers need the skills from this hidden talent pool. They are asking for help to reach, recruit, and train older workers.

AARP Foundation's Workforce Programs, SCSEP and BACK TO WORK 50+, equip low-income and unemployed older adults with the skills and resources to regain and maintain employment.

**SCSEP**, short for the Senior Community Service Employment Program, is authorized by the Older Americans Act and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). SCSEP provides training assignments designed to enhance skills that enable low-income, unemployed older adults to obtain unsubsidized employment. The program focuses especially on people who have significant barriers to employment.

To be eligible, participants' income can't exceed 125 percent of the federal poverty guideline (\$15,075). While in the program, participants receive critical income support through subsidized wages (at the minimum wage) for 20 hours per week, which helps them to stay out of poverty.

AARP Foundation has administered this program for 50 years, and currently supports over 80 sites across the country, including the state grants for Florida, Washington, and Missouri. In 2017, AARP Foundation SCSEP served more than 14,000 people, partnered with over 3,600 community agencies, and placed more than 3,300 participants in jobs. Reports show that 75% of participants who obtained employment in the past were still working 9 months later. However, at current funding levels, SCSEP only serves about 1% of eligible low-income older jobseekers.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> VOE Survey, *supra* n. 4, at 9.

<sup>7</sup> K. Mikelson, *The Role of SCSEP in Workforce Training for Low-Income Older Workers* 10 (Urban Inst., 2017), at [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/94371/2001575\\_scsep\\_white\\_paper\\_finalized\\_2.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/94371/2001575_scsep_white_paper_finalized_2.pdf)

**BACK TO WORK 50+** was born out of this deep knowledge of the needs and challenges faced by older workers, and our daily experience that many more people need assistance than we could help with SCSEP.

We designed BACK TO WORK 50+ to provide the training, coaching and job seeking tools older adults need to compete with confidence for today's in-demand jobs. The programs are delivered through a trained contact center, and a network of local workforce development organizations. We recruit unemployed people interested in full-time employment to call our toll-free number and register for Smart Strategies Workshops in their area. Local partners host the 2-hour "7 Smart Strategies for 50+ Jobseekers" workshops where they show jobseekers how to use these strategies in their own job search in their own communities. At the end of the workshop, they explain options for continued job search support, including a BACK TO WORK 50+ Coaching program that includes individual coaching, job search classes, computer skills assessment and skill building, referrals to occupational training, and employer access opportunities. AARP Foundation helps with outreach and provides the infrastructure, tools, and resources and limited grant funding, while local organizations contribute staffing, expertise, and employer engagement.

Our national contact center responds to calls from over 20,000 workers age 50 and older from all across the country each year. Our trained associates connect callers to local American Job Centers and SCSEP programs and mail them copies of the guides if there is not a BACK TO WORK program within 25 miles of where they live.

We launched the program in 2013, by first piloting it with an American Job Center and non-profit partners, and then expanding to community colleges. In 2014, we partnered with the American Association of Community Colleges and the Walmart Foundation to adapt the BACK TO WORK 50+ model to community colleges. Since then, the model has been embraced by American Job Centers, community colleges, and non-profit workforce development organizations. We use a Salesforce.com CRM to track our results. We believe this program supports our target audience of unemployed workers age 50 and older seeking full-time work. Since 2013, we have hosted over 1200 Smart Strategies Workshops, which were attended by over 15,000 older workers:

- 73% were unemployed and 84% were low income and age 50 or older.
- 32% were African American, 48% were White, 7% identified as multicultural, and just over 2% identified themselves as Asian American or Native American. In addition, 16% reported they were Hispanic.
- 72% were women and 28% were men.
- 77% of the workers who reported employment held full-time jobs with an average wage of over \$15/hour.

**BACK TO WORK 50+ at Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, Alabama<sup>8</sup>** is anchored in the Career Center and Workforce Education Departments at Jefferson State Community College. The Directors from both departments collaborate to recruit 50+ job candidates, facilitate the Smart Strategies for 50+ Jobseekers Workshops, and select applicants

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(citing D. Kogan, H. Betesh, et al., *Evaluation of the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)* (DOL, 2012), at [https://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText\\_Documents/ETAOP\\_2013\\_03.pdf](https://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/ETAOP_2013_03.pdf)).

<sup>8</sup> BACK TO WORK 50+ is a national network with a local focus. A full list of the local projects is appended at the end of this statement.

for the Coaching Program that helps people find and enroll in computer skills and occupational training programs.

In 2017, the team supported over 200 50+ job candidates through workshops and coaching. Many also enrolled in short-term training programs such as certified production technician, welding, pharmacy tech, medical billing, medical assistant, and Microsoft certification. The Coaching Program is 3 days/week coaching for 3 week. They offer 3 levels of computer training depending on the job candidate's needs. In their 2017 program year, 55% of job candidates who completed core services reported employment. Those 64 workers reported an average wage of over \$14 an hour.

AARP Foundation's goal is to help low-income 50+ workers by continuing to build alliances with organizations like Jefferson State Community College who share our commitment to older workers, and want to imbed AARP Foundation Workforce Program tools and resources into their workforce development programs to better serve the needs of their area's aging workforce.

Congress also has a role in helping to ensure that older workers have the skills and training to find and keep jobs. The next Congress will start working on reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which expires at the end of FY 2020. WIOA contained some improvements, but the upcoming WIOA reauthorization will provide Congress with the opportunity to ensure that the job search and workforce development needs of older workers are more effectively addressed.

#### **Conclusion**

Today, Americans are healthier than earlier generations, often working into their 70s and beyond, and they continue to have big dreams and goals. It is now common to see four or five different generations working side by side in the workplace, and that trend will continue in the future, as long as we don't let outdated stereotypes about age or other barriers to get in the way. Much can and needs to be done to ensure that older workers can continue to make valuable contributions to their employers, the economy, and the nation as a whole. AARP Foundation again thanks this Committee for inviting us to testify and we look forward to answering any questions you may have.

BACK TO WORK 50+ is a national network with a local focus. In 2018, the BACK TO WORK 50+ Network included 16 organizations in 26 locations in twelve states.

BACK TO WORK 50+ Network Member	City	State
Jefferson State Community College	Birmingham	AL
Pima Community College	Tucson	AZ
Sacramento Employment and Training Agency	Sacramento	CA
Arapahoe/Douglas Works! Workforce Center	Centennial	CO
DC Department of Employment Services	Washington	DC
CareerSource Brevard	Cocoa	FL
Santa Fe College	Gainesville	FL
Youth Co-Op, Inc. (6 sites)	Miami	FL
Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (5 sites)	Chicago	IL
Mott Community College	Flint	MI
A-B Tech Community College	Asheville	NC
Tri-County Technical College	Pendleton	SC
Austin Community College	Austin	TX
Workforce Solutions Borderplex	El Paso	TX
Tarrant County College District	Fort Worth	TX
AARP Foundation-Richmond	Richmond	VA

**Statement of Sheila Baker  
Director of Senior Community Service Employment Programs (SCSEP),  
Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging**

Intro: My name is Sheila Baker and I am director of the Senior Community Service Employment Programs (SCSEP) administered by Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging (M4A) in our six-county region. This includes Blount Chilton Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby and Walker Counties.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program is a national program that provides qualified, low income adults, 55 and older, with part-time subsidized employment and prepares them for the local job market. SCSEP is authorized by the Older Americans Act and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and is administered by Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging (M4A).

SCSEP was created in 1965, and is the nation's oldest program to help low-income, unemployed individuals aged 55 and older find work. SCSEP matches eligible older adults with part-time jobs for community service organizations based on their employment interest. Participants build skills and self-confidence, while earning a modest income. Participants work an average of 20 hours a week and are paid the state's prevailing minimum wage.

SCSEP participants must be at least 55, unemployed, and have a family income of no more than 125% of the federal poverty level. Enrollment priority is given to veterans and qualified spouses, then to individuals who are over 75, have a disability, have low literacy skills or limited English proficiency, reside in a rural area, are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have low employment prospects.

M4A is committed to making it possible for low-income and other disadvantaged older adults participate fully in determining their own future and the future of their communities. M4A provides employment opportunities to low-income and other older adults in our six-county region. Participants not only receive training at their host agency but, can attend computer classes, work with various agencies that have job readiness programs, some attend school for GED and/or ESL classes.

For over nine years M4A has operated the Senior Community Service Employment Program and currently partners with a diverse network of local government and non-profit organizations in our six-county service area.

**About SCSEP Nationally**

- 65,081 low-income older Americans received paid employment and training
- More than 2,000 public and nonprofit agencies (like libraries and senior centers) are supported with more than 34 million staff hours
- 51% of participants gained unsubsidized employment following the program

- \$820 million in community service provided by SCSEP participants – nearly twice the total appropriation for the program
- 88% of participants reported the same or better physical health while working
- 72% reported a better outlook on life while working

**Who are SCSEP participants?**

- 32% are 65 or older; 13% are 70 or older
- 65% are women; 49% are a racial or ethnic minority; 20% have at least one disability
- 43% have one or more years of college; 39% have a high school diploma; 18% do not have a high school diploma
- 13% are veterans or qualified spouses
- 28% live in rural areas

**Doug Dean, Chief Human Resource Officer  
Children's of Alabama**

**Statement on Workforce Recruiting/Retention of Seniors**

"As Alabama's premier, comprehensive provider of pediatric healthcare services for the children of Alabama and surrounding states, the fulfillment of our vital mission rises and falls in large part as a result of attracting, developing, and retaining highly skilled talent to deliver safe, quality care with excellent outcomes. In recent decades, a key focus of our strategy has been to work very hard to understand our workforce demographics, and then customize our workplace practices to recruiting and retention of defined segments."

"Today, the Children's of Alabama workforce is comprised of 25% Boomers (53-70 age band), 29% 'Gen X (36-52 age band), and clearly on the rise as mirrored by the U.S. total workforce demographics, 46% Millennials (20-35 age band). Yet, we have compelling evidence that what allows us to ensure quality, safety, and reliable performance in our service delivery is the fact of our highly experienced foundation of **workers over 40**, who are long-tenured, and deliver critically important mentoring and education of incoming new graduate talent! There is also abundant evidence that our age diversity is a strength in terms of delivering **family-centered care** to our diverse patient-families."



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**Additional Statements for the Record**

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**Testimony of Ramona Reach, Office Manager  
Acton Road Pediatrics, LLC  
Birmingham, Alabama**

Good day Dr. Tamara Payne and members of the Special Senate Committee on Aging.

I am honored and humbled to speak with you today regarding both my professional and personal experiences with this topic. My name is Ramona Reach. I am a devoted wife, mother and grandmother. I went back to school when I was 43 years old and obtained my Bachelors in business administration through Faulkner University's fast pace program.

I am also the office manager for Acton Road Pediatrics, LLC.

Alabama has a wealth of knowledgeable older individuals who put their families before their careers. By this I mean the stay at home mom and the hard working mid-level employee. I can speak in terms of us as I have walked this same path. The knowledge I can speak to your committee of is of dedication sometimes out of desperation and loyalty with a cause that our +50 generation have to offer a company's workforce.

First, dedication sometimes out of desperation is brought on by having to go to work to provide the basic needs of your family. Then the family dynamics change and the dedication becomes a life experience which has the potential to propel you into a new career. Jefferson State Community College provided such a place for the two associates I recently hired. Both Rose and Linda came to their career choices basically out of family dynamic changes. These ladies are present and ready to work every day and have improved the moral of their coworkers. They are teaching by example how to work for a company verses how to work at a company. I have had the opportunity to watch both these ladies take on their current duties with a drive and dedication to learn and perform them correctly. They are not afraid to ask questions and make the changes necessary to be successful. It has been a pleasure to watch the dynamic between our senior associates (10 to 20 years younger). The senior associates picked up quickly on the drive and dedication and many have made a conscious effort to spend time with them. It is the unseen teaching of Rose and Linda in those around them that is severely lacking in our young and sometimes disenchanting work force. In the short time these ladies have shown exemplary dedication.

Loyalty with cause is a normal and expected attribute to a hard working individual with a drive to be successful. Loyalty presented both ways as the company to the employee and the employee to the company. In the short time these ladies have been with Acton Road Pediatrics I have watch a change start and the working at is becoming the working for our company.

If we as members of the American workforce and owners of business overlook the positive resources that our senior + 50 have to offer our younger generation of workers we are doing an injustice to humanity. If we do not have the + 50 generation helping to guide, instruct, nurture and share life experiences with those that have not had the opportunity to experience these for themselves we lose a valuable opportunity. Opportunities in America are growing and the workforce has skilled positons opening up. Who will teach them if we do not tap into individuals that have shown the ability to take the initiative to go back to school and get the training and bring life experiences to share with our world?

I appreciate the opportunity to share what is happening at our office with you. I deeply hope you will openly consider what we have to lose if we lose the +50 generation workforce. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have to support this esteem cause.

