

TESTIMONY OF RONICA JACKSON
BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

March 6, 2008, 10:00 AM

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Ronica Jackson and I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify about why extending unemployment benefits will help me and many Americans in similar dire straights.

My name is Ronica Jackson and I was born in Boston and presently live in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I grew up in a family that valued education, and maintained a strong work ethic.

My late mother, Dr. Ellen Swepson Jackson, was a civil rights leader in Boston. I can still hear my mother's strong voice telling me with much emphasis and conviction "you must get your education."

At the age of sixteen I graduated from high school and went on to the University of Massachusetts where I received a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. I worked full time while attending the University full time.

I have always worked --- first as a group leader for children at the New England Home for Little Wanderers, then five years in social

services with at-risk youth, five years in health care as a Human Resource Generalist and practice manager, and fifteen years in hospitality management. I have worked as a general manager, trainer, auditor, and human resources manager. Everywhere I have worked, I have been appreciated, promoted and earned great recommendations when I moved on to new opportunities.

In the fall of 2003 I relocated back to Boston to help care for my mother. I worked for a year as a manager of a clinical practice in a Boston hospital. As my mother's health continued to fail, I stopped working, knowing that a person with my experience, references and skills I would never have trouble getting a good job. Unfortunately, in 2005, my mother passed. I returned to a world that seemed to have changed, where jobs were scarce.

I became a temp and contract employee. This past fall I started a temp job, became ill, and was in the hospital for six weeks. Once I was discharged from the hospital. I then applied for other temp jobs with the same agency and others. But even temp jobs and contract jobs seemed to have disappeared. Finally, I was told by the agency to apply for unemployment.

Since that time, I have done everything I can think of to find work. I have networked through friends, past associates and former employers. My resume is on every internet site that made sense. I call and check in with the agencies almost daily. Now, I no longer can afford internet access at home so I go to library to search for jobs.

Even when employers post jobs they seem to not be filling them. They either pull them, sit on them, or postpone them.

As you can imagine this has been frustrating and at times infuriating. Recently a recruiter informed me that a position had been on hold for almost a year but the employer was now ready to go forward and hire someone. The interview went well and ended with the department head asking me if I could start the following Monday at 9 A.M. I waited for a formal offer through the agency but the employer never followed through with the position and the position was never filled. I have taken and will take any viable job. I have purposely played down my skills and experience to secure temp jobs.

Despite my best efforts, help from friends and family, I am in a very bleak financial position. I have had to ask friends and family for money and they have been incredibly understanding and helpful when possible. But there is no denying that this is very embarrassing to be in this position.

My unemployment insurance ended the second week of February and my rent is paid only through the end of this month. In fact, my landlord took me to court to evict me. I have lived there for ten years and have been one or two weeks late with my rent several times over the last year. My landlord has always liked me as a tenant but he has bills to pay too. It takes five weekly Unemployment Insurance checks to accumulate just enough for my monthly rent, given the weekly unemployment rate I was at. My other bills, including utilities, have not been paid, and have either been disconnected or shut-off notices have been sent to me.

Now if I can't pay April rent, I could very well be homeless as of April first. Sometimes I look back at my life and am astounded by the breadth and the richness of my life as well as my personal

accomplishments and the accomplishments, sacrifices, and hard work of my parents and family.

Then, I shake my head in disbelief; it often brings me to tears that I am in what feels like an insurmountable, impossible situation. I have worked all my life and never imagined I would be in a situation like this.

I have come here to Washington testify before you with four dollars to my name.

On behalf of so many Americans who share my story, who through no fault of their own are dependent on unemployment insurance, I ask that you extend unemployment so we have a chance of finding work and surviving these hard times.