

Testimony of Sabrina Shrader
Athens, WV
US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging
“Dying Young: Why Your Social and Economic Status May Be a Death Sentence in America”
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My name is Sabrina Shrader and I am one among millions who are struggling to make ends meet in America. Unfortunately, it had been very difficult to succeed in the type of environment I have been given. Because of inadequate healthcare, lack of transportation, and lack of resources, I was born into a family that was afflicted by domestic violence, child abuse, and mental illness. My parents weren't perfect but they taught me to do my best, treat people how I want to be treated, and to pray.

I am from a hollow in West Virginia called Twin Branch. I grew up in McDowell County, one of the poorest counties, in one of the poorest states of the Country. Due to conditions influenced by poverty, decreased chances for success are often swayed by drugs abuse, poor healthcare, limited access to healthy food choices, unhealthy lifestyle habits such as smoking cigarettes and little interstate access.

Some say poverty is a death sentence. Frankly, I don't know how many times I have been given that death sentence. Even before I was born, doctors were questioning whether or not my mom should have me because she was 16 years old and her future and mine looked bleak. The doctors didn't even think I was alive and they told her she would die if she chose to have me. I was born 3 months early and was born without fingernails, eye lashes, and hair.

Another time I was given a not so positive prognosis was on a snowy day. When I was in the 11th grade, my mom and I got into a terrible car accident on our way to the bus stop. I had

perfect attendance and had made almost straight A's for most of my life. The car wreck left me as doctors said repeatedly "mentally challenged and paralyzed." I learned to walk and talk again and I bounced back with resiliency and started to make good grades again. I made it to college and there I got meningitis and was given a death sentence once again. I literally waited to die that time I was in the hospital. Fortunately, I went back to school and tried my hardest to learn and here I am in front of you all today.

Furthermore, I have seen many die before their time. I've had family members, friends, and classmates all die young. The deaths started a couple of days after I was born with my mom's favorite aunt dying and another one of her favorite aunt's dying a couple months after that. This past year, both of my stepsisters have died. One was in a car accident and had water on her brain from drowning in the river. She like me had learned to walk and talk again but after getting pneumonia repeatedly she died in the hospital. The other didn't go to the hospital when she needed to for not wanting to incur additional medical bills and she died from a brain hemorrhage.

A strong correlation between poverty and life expectancy exists. While many children are born into poverty every day, poverty is not a family's fault and it is not a child's fault. No one who is born into poverty asks for a life that is encompassed with suffering for everything you need to live for every day. But nowadays we seem more interested in taking things away from these kids, instead of giving them a fair shot.

Today, I am in the Advanced Standing Master of Social Work Program at Concord University and I am the Program Assistant for the Upward Bound program at Concord too. This program gave me hope when I was in the 6th grade of one day being able to go to college. If it

hadn't been for the program, I may not even know what a college campus looks like. I am the first person in my family to not only graduate high school but to also get a bachelor's degree. If it hadn't been for TRIO programs like Upward Bound and Student Support Services, I don't know where I would be today.

TRIO programs help vulnerable kids survive and gives them hope to follow their dreams. There are 2 Upward Bound programs at Concord University and they serve 150 high school students from 5 high need counties in West Virginia. Sequestration cut our budget 5.23% and TRIO programs face additional budget cuts thus causing fewer children to be helped. Programs like Upward Bound and Student Support Services make it a little easier to try harder and keep a positive attitude when times are tough and hope is rare. I have seen other people who are like me not be in TRIO programs and have suffered worse consequences such as being compelled to use drugs and some have committed suicide.

TRIO programs make a huge difference for the students living in poverty stricken areas. High school graduation rates are near 100% and postsecondary education rates are 70% for poverty students enrolled in TRIO programs. TRIO programs save lives. People living in poverty do not have as good of odds of living a long happy healthy life when compared to people who can easily meet their basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter every day.

Please don't misunderstand me when I say that I am not a success story. I am still struggling but I am not struggling alone. I am also a leader with the Our Children, Our Future Campaign. Our goal is to end child poverty in West Virginia. For the first part of my life, most people wouldn't even listen to me. But this campaign has listened and helped me organize in my community to make a difference. Now I am telling everyone I know. I am talking with my

family, my church, my workplace, and in my neighborhood so that everyone else knows they can make a difference too. Thank you for your time and for listening. God Bless You.