

Testimony of Rochelle Jackson, Welfare Advocate  
Just Harvest, Pittsburgh  
House Human Services Committee  
Hearing on SNAP Asset Test  
March 15, 2012

Good morning Representatives and thank you for holding this hearing. My name is Rochelle Jackson and I am a Welfare Advocate from Just Harvest in Pittsburgh. My comments this morning will be brief because I would like to leave time for two consumers whom Just Harvest helped apply for the SNAP to share their concerns with you. I have been an advocate at Just Harvest for 10+ years and my experience with Welfare is both professional and personal. In addition to being an advocate, I am a single mother of four children. I was married at a very young age and as a result of domestic violence and divorce I found myself alone and in need of assistance. The food stamp program was there for me and my children when we needed it most and for that I am eternally grateful. I am an honest person and have always utilized public benefits with extreme integrity but I am not the exception. I have done this work long enough to know that most people who utilize the SNAP program are honest and grateful for the help they receive.

Just Harvest started a project five years ago which educates the community about SNAP and assists people with SNAP applications. In addition to submitting the applications electronically on behalf of applicants, we assist them with getting the necessary verification documents to the County Assistance Office. We provide ongoing follow up and advocacy to the applicants because the journey from doing the application to actually receiving the benefits is a difficult one. There are many problems that applicants encounter and the most common problem is the County Assistance Office losing their documents. Another common problem is the County Assistance Office not getting the application processed and determined within 30 days. Everyday our phones at Just Harvest are flooded with complaints from those that we have helped apply for SNAP and those that we haven't. Countless applicants' benefits are delayed or rejected because the County Assistance Office caseworkers lose documents and fail to process applications in a timely fashion. Many current consumers who are in the process of renewing their benefits lose their benefits for the same reasons. When I think about the asset test, it



literally keeps me up at night thinking of all the additional documents and work that caseworkers will have to do and how many consumers will suffer as a result of it.

Just last week I met with the Executive Director for Allegheny County Assistance Offices and her staff and they are extremely anxious about this new requirement because most of their staff is new and have never been trained on the asset test. How will they train them? When will they train them? Will the caseworkers be able to maintain their caseload with this additional responsibility? These are all questions they are grappling with. It doesn't really seem as though the reinstatement of the asset test will bring any realized savings to the budget and with a fraud rate of 0.1% in SNAP it also doesn't seem as though it will do a whole lot to cut down on fraud and abuse. So that leads me to believe that the reason for the reinstatement is purely moral and therefore not necessary. This requirement would further penalize struggling Pennsylvania families and make it more difficult for them to ever get back on their feet. What kind of message are we sending? Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I would now like to introduce Mrs. Linda Davis. Just Harvest helped Mrs. Davis apply for the SNAP and she is very grateful for the benefits she receives. She is concerned that the asset test will jeopardize her benefits but I will let her express that in her own way. Before Mrs. Davis speaks, I would like to read the testimony of another consumer that Just Harvest helped apply for the SNAP.

