

To the Honorable Chair of the Committee on Human Services:

My name is Maria Rivera and I have been the recipient of the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit for 6 years.

EITC has helped me make a lot of positive changes in my life. I moved to Hartford from Puerto Rico when I was 6 years old. I am also one of three children who was raised by a single mother. We grew up in the North End and then later moved to the South End. My mother never had the opportunity to own a home. She has worked very hard our entire lives – working two jobs and always refusing any social welfare program, regardless of whether or not we qualified for the assistance.

Being a proud mother of 3 children, all under the age of 19, I work very hard to provide a better life for my family. Like my mother, I am a single-parent who acquired debt as part of raising three children. In 2002, I used the EITC money to pay-off a number of bills I had fallen behind on. It was a starting point for me to begin repairing many of the difficult things that have happened to me both personally and financially.

Through the help of financial literacy classes at a local not-for-profit, I learned how to budget better. This way, the EITC money I receive goes towards building assets rather than playing catch-up. Every year, since 2002 I have qualified for EITC and I used that money to better myself and my family – instilling in my children the need to work hard and save for their futures.

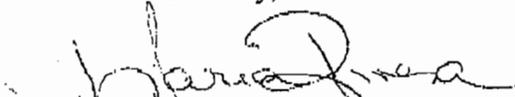
After I leveled off all the bad debt, I opened an Individual Development Account. I set a monthly savings goal and supplemented the goal with EITC money. In 2004, I achieved the dream of homeownership. I could not have reached this goal without the first few years of EITC money. It empowered me to save more frequently and showed me that achieving a goal is never as far away as you think. It may take time to reach that goal, but there are ways to make it happen in a reasonable amount of time.

I believe that if more people had the opportunity to receive EITC or the state considered a similar program, it would create a benchmark for people to start saving. People could change their way of life and their thinking about finances. Being in debt makes you feel overwhelmed and powerless. It is a constant black cloud over everything you do and you can never feel that you will be out from under the darkness.

Programs like EITC gives people the opportunity to use their regular paycheck to go towards current bills and set-up a budget that can be followed. This way when they receive the EITC funds it gives individuals access to emergency reserves or to pay-down debts in order to free-up more income. Introduce more programs like this will help break the cycle of spending. People will improve their quality of life and go from crisis mode to having the security of savings.

It is for this reason that I strongly encourage the legislators serving the needs of the people in Connecticut to create, accept and adopt a "State Earned Income Tax Credit" to allow more people like me to become financially stable. By doing so, the local economy will become stronger and the quality of life for more people will improve.

Sincerely,



Maria Rivera