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**Testimony to the Legislative Program Review & Investigations Committee**

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**Re: Reemployment of Older Workers**

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*Age 50+ and Unemployed: An At Risk Population*

My name is Novlette Williams. I am 60 years old and I have been under-employed for the past four years. I worked for a prominent insurance company for 25 years and despite promises that our jobs were safe, my department was outsourced, leaving 75 individuals at their wits end to join the unemployment line. I say "wits end" because we were not eligible to retire and collect Social Security, nor were we eligible for Medicare benefits. This group of individuals ranged in age from their late 40s to early 60s.

After beating the job search pavement for a year without success, I went back to school to achieve the marketability I thought necessary to compete with younger jobseekers in today's job market. While studying, I never gave up seeking full-time work or additional part time work (I work part-time at a crisis hotline now). I now have a Master's degree in social work and still face barriers in getting employed. There are many older Americans facing these same barriers. As a grandmother I have a mortgage to pay and I have two grandsons that I am helping to raise following their mother's death.

The barriers I face are hard to prove, but they are unmistakable. For instance, I have had phone interviews and the hiring manager expresses how much they want my services as I have all these great experiences. However, after I am called in for the second interview and I make my appearance, the zeal expressed for my skill set disappears. Upon my introduction, I am looked over from head to toe and I see the change when my gray hair is observed and also my gender - I don't have the profile of a "cheer leader". I was even once told by a recruiter that I might consider coloring my hair, as it would take some age off my appearance.

All I want is to maintain my self-sufficiency through work. There was a barrier of not being qualified, which I have overcome through education, and yet the age barrier is now a hindrance. Younger managers/recruiters have no interest in having seniors around. At the Labor office, an assigned worker impressed upon me how she thought I should just retire since it is not worthwhile to take on another career because "you have so much experience."

All I hear is "why don't you retire?" to which I have to politely explain my age ... I am not old enough to retire, but it seems many think I am too old to work.

I thank you for your study of this critical topic. While I do not have all the answers as to what bills you should draft and what administrative changes you should make, I do know that you must do something to help improve the outlook for the older worker here in Connecticut.

Thank you for listening to my story and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.