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**Testimony to the Labor & Public Employees Committee**

**February 18, 2014**

**In Support of HB # 5054: AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYED JOB SEEKERS**

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My name is Novlette Williams. I am 60 years old and I have been under-employed for over 4 years. I thank you for this hearing on House Bill Number 5054 and for your effort to prohibit exclusion of the unemployed from consideration by companies hiring new employees.

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 try to achieve the marketability necessary for a new career and to compete with younger jobseekers. While studying, I never gave up seeking full-time work or additional part time work.

I now have a Master's degree in social work and still face barriers in getting employed. I have been able to find part time work, but even that has been a challenging and bumpy road. There are many older Americans facing these same challenges. 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. While I believe many are because of my age, I also believe that my employment status plays a significant factor. Older and unemployed or underemployed, for many, means you are not valuable and have little to offer an employer. I know in my heart that this is not true, but the psychological toll it takes is real and devastating. I am sure I don't need to explain to you the obvious financial toll it takes.

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 and employment status are barriers now. It's ironic that I want and need to work so badly and I am so often faced with the comment "why don't you retire?" I can only 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 attention to critical issue. It is sad that this is an issue that needs legislating, but I am grateful for a bill that will prevent employers from elimination hard working people like me from the pool of qualified candidates simply because of my current employment status. I hope you will also work in partnership with your colleagues in the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, whom I testified before in the fall, to support their efforts to really make "Equal Opportunity" something that the over age 50 job seeker can believe in again.

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