

Hello Everyone, and good afternoon. I want to thank all of you for being here today and listening to my story. Today I would like to tell you a little of my family's story, as they are my source of inspiration. Without them, I would not be the person I am today. For decades my family has suffered under poverty, with episodes of homelessness throughout their lives. We have lived in houses with roaches and rats and without beds or running water. We have experienced food insecurity, instability, and the stigma against the poor and homeless.

When I was sixteen, my family was evicted and banned from subsidized housing, and so became homeless. My disabled father lived in a tent in the woods and then off of the generosity of his friends. My disabled mother and disabled sisters lived with family members, and then a shelter for six months. My father has epilepsy and a damaged shoulder, which has prevented him from keeping a job my entire life. He is one of the most hardworking people I know, and it is from him I learned my work ethic. My mother has myotonic dystrophy, a muscle deterioration disorder, that has also prevented her from maintaining a career my entire life. She is one of the smartest and kindest people I know. She taught me to be empathetic and generous, and to focus on my education above all else as the path out of poverty begins with a good education.

They have not only gone out of their way to help me and each other, but other people too. My family was always there to lend a hand to those in need despite how little they themselves had. My family have done everything in their power to keep us together and ensure that I have a bright future. They have survived these adversities through their strength and perseverance, and I have always known them as the survivors that they are.

However, they would have not gotten anywhere without the help they received from those around them. It was my father's disability checks, welfare, hud, food stamps, and the generosity of friends and family that have helped me and my family survive through all of these years. Poverty affects so many different types of people, and I want to ensure that the disabled

are not forgotten in this conversation or the pursuit of higher education. Because of my family, I understand that having a disability can make it more difficult to pursue a college education and survive in this world.

We are all here because we understand the significance of education as a stepping stone out of poverty. We want to break the barriers that prevent youth who are poor and homeless from taking that first step. However, I want to ensure that we don't forget that not only do we each have a personal responsibility to others, but the systems we live under also have a responsibility to others. There needs to be an expansion an improvement of programs that help provide the basic necessities of life for poor and disabled people, so that they are in positions where they can take advantage of the great opportunity of higher education.

Once, when I discussed the poverty that my nephew faces, and my current financial inability to assuage that poverty, a woman remarked that not everyone can be saved and we shouldn't worry too much about it. I believe that she was wrong. And because you are here today, you are proving that she was wrong. Everyone can be saved, and we will help save them.