

TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE OSASU

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“Aging with Purpose: The Positive Impact of Seniors in Today’s Economy”

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Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. It is a privilege afforded to very few to address this esteemed body, and I do so with both deep gratitude and a profound sense of responsibility to the seniors in my community. The stories and struggles of our seniors deserve to be heard, and I am honored to share a few stories with you today.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Christine Osasu, and for the past ten years, I have dedicated my career to serving some of Georgia’s most vulnerable populations—first as a loan originator with Habitat for Humanity, and for the last four years as the Director of the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at The Legacy Link, a nonprofit and designated Area Agency on Aging. Our mission is to empower aging adults and individuals with disabilities by connecting them to resources to be their link to a better life. Our SCSEP program serves 107 counties across Georgia as a proud subgrantee of the National Council on Aging (NCOA).

Today, I’m here to share how training through the SCSEP program has transformed lives—empowering older adults to reenter the workforce, reclaim their confidence, affirm their value, and take meaningful steps toward self-sufficiency. I’m also here to share the devastating impact of the SCSEP funding pause—a crisis that left nearly 30,000 seniors across the country in limbo, without income, structure, or support¹.

I am deeply grateful to Ranking Member Gillibrand for leading a group letter to the Labor Secretary regarding the SCSEP funding delay, and to Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gillibrand for their bipartisan efforts to reintroduce the Older Americans Act (OAA) reauthorization.

¹ U.S. Dep’t of Labor, *National Quarterly Progress Report* (July 7, 2025), <https://cmp.dol.gov/suite/sites/dol>.

SCSEP, authorized under the OAA, is a federally funded job training program for low-income seniors aged 55 and older. It functions much like a paid internship for seniors. Participants receive hands-on training at nonprofit and government agencies, where they gain new skills. The host agencies benefit from having experienced dedicated workers—at no cost—who often become permanent employees. We serve those seniors who have the most significant barriers to employment, and we have a proud history of pulling people out of homelessness and reducing reliance on public assistance programs.

SCSEP has existed since 1965, and for good reason: it works. It is a lifeline for seniors who want to work, who need to work, and who still have so much to contribute.

BARRIERS SENIORS FACE

While working combats social isolation and improves mental and physical health, make no mistake—SCSEP participants are not working for enjoyment². They are working to survive. To qualify for the program, seniors must have incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, which is approximately \$1,600 per month for a single person. With the rising costs of food, housing, healthcare, and more, these limited-income seniors are struggling to pay for basic necessities. As people are living longer, they need more in savings to sustain them, and many have no savings at all, living paycheck to paycheck.

Seniors are strong and resilient—but they are also growing tired of being left behind by systems that are becoming more automated and less human.

Seniors face real and persistent age discrimination in the workforce. They also face technological barriers that make even applying for a job feel insurmountable.

“...[They] find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists.” —Eric Hoffer

Imagine trying to navigate today’s job market without an email address or basic computer skills. For many older adults, this is a reality. That’s where SCSEP steps in—empowering seniors with the tools and training they need to navigate the digital world.

Last year, Legacy Link launched a Digital Empowerment Program that provided participants with tablets and hands-on instruction in essential technology skills, from job searching to basic office software—opening new doors to employment and independence.

² U.S. Dep’t of Labor, PY 2020 Nationwide Participant Evaluation of SCSEP (Mar. 25, 2022), https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/seniors/pdfs/PY2020%20Nationwide%20Participant%20Survey%20Report_3%2025%202022.pdf.

IMPACT OF THE PAUSE

Due to a delay in releasing FY25 funding by the Department of Labor to the national grantees, most SCSEP participants were placed on an unpaid break for four and a half months. This pause in SCSEP funding greatly harmed older adults who were already facing the most significant barriers to employment.

The majority of SCSEP funds directly pay for participants' wages. For many, this pause meant missed meals, unstable housing, and growing uncertainty about the future, especially as they were not eligible to collect unemployment during the pause.

In Georgia, the \$7.25-per-hour SCSEP training wage may seem insignificant to some. But for someone surviving on less than \$1,600 a month, this paid training is a lifeline. When training was paused—it wasn't just an inconvenience. It had life-threatening consequences for our seniors: homelessness, skipped medications, food rationing, and grandchildren going without school supplies.

A heartbreaking story from North Georgia illustrates the devastating impact of the pause.

A short while into the pause, an undeliverable letter led to an unexpected heartbreak. As usual, I called the participant to verify his address when the letter was returned. I anticipated a routine conversation—but his words stopped me in my tracks. When asked for his updated address he said, “Ms. Christine, I wish I could give you my updated address, but I don't have one. I couldn't pay for my housing, I've maxed out my time in the shelter, and now I'm living in a tent.”

Our seniors want to work—and many must work. Social Security alone is not enough to survive. When the SCSEP program is paused, the impact is immediate and devastating.

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Older adults want to work. When given the opportunity, they support themselves with dignity, reducing reliance on food stamps, subsidized housing, and public assistance.

Ms. Plant, age 59, shared her story:

“After losing my husband to COVID in 2020, I became homeless—bouncing between shelters and motels. SCSEP helped me stabilize my life. It allowed me to cover basic needs, pursue training in medical coding, and give back by serving meals at the soup kitchen. Without it, I'd be at risk of losing everything again.”

Healthy, engaged older adults are a vital asset to our economy. With the right tools and opportunities, they don't just participate, they lead, mentor, and multiply impact. Investing

in seniors means investing in experience, reliability, and resilience. They are valuable, capable members of the workforce who enrich every organization they join.

SCSEP delivers a strong return on investment by preparing seniors for meaningful employment—benefiting not just individuals, but society as a whole. SCSEP is the key—to stronger businesses, reduced public spending, less social isolation, and a more inclusive, resilient workforce.

Thank you for your commitment to improving the lives of our seniors. I urge you to remain diligent in the fight for a better world for older Americans—because we are all aging, and we deserve to age well.