

Lisa Motta
Testimony before the
United States Senate Special Committee on Aging
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Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Casey, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify. It is an honor to participate in a discussion on such an important subject.

My name is Lisa Motta. I am 54 years old and a resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I am a recruiting administrator at PNC Financial Services, where I have worked for the last three years.

Before being hired by PNC, I had been out of the workforce for most of the previous 20 years. My first career was as an elementary teacher. It was a job I loved, but when my vision began to decline due to glaucoma, it became increasingly difficult to go to work every day. Eventually I gave up my job as a teacher and chose instead to work full-time raising my two wonderful children at home. I knew that I wanted to return to work one day, but I didn't know exactly how or when it would be possible.

As my children grew older and my husband and I began to think both about their college tuition and trying to put away enough money to retire one day, I started to plan how I could return to work. Starting a second career in your 50s can be a daunting task for anyone, but it felt particularly challenging at times due to me now being totally blind. I was fortunate to have a partner in my corner who had overcome some of the same obstacles I was facing – my husband who is legally blind– but it was still difficult to even figure out where to begin.

To maintain my teaching certification, I enrolled at a nearby college, but it was hard to find work in that field. I began looking for part-time work and did temporarily find a position doing marketing for a local chiropractic business, but that job was eliminated not long after.

One of the most challenging parts of trying to find work was simply getting my foot in the door and getting my face in front of someone for an interview. Many job applications online are difficult to navigate and submit using the screen reading software which enable people with visual impairments like me to use computers. Then, when I was able to land interviews, it felt like many potential employers would make assumptions about my abilities based on my disability the second I walked in the door with my guide dog.

Things turned around though when I applied for a job at PNC, and they offered me a job in their human resources department. It was a fantastic opportunity and I was ready to run with it, but just before I was about to start, my guide dog had to be retired. Fortunately, the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation was able to help me identify and learn a public transportation route to work that I could navigate with a long cane until my new guide dog arrived. When my dog Aspen did make it to Pittsburgh, OVR also helped me pattern her to all of my important locations downtown and at home, and they assigned a local access-technology vendor to help me figure out how to make my accessibility software work with PNC's computer systems. After

overcoming these initial obstacles, I was finally able to settle in to my new full-time job coordinating job interviews with candidates all across the country.

Since then, I have also worked with the wonderful folks at OVR and with my supportive managers at PNC to help make PNC a workplace that is, as we say, not just ADA-compliant, but ADA-friendly. When our entire department moved to a new building early this year, we worked together to make the workplace accessible and welcoming to individuals with visual disabilities.

My second career has enabled me to work toward my personal goals like saving for retirement, but it has also given me the opportunity to advocate for others facing some of the same challenges I did. I know how difficult and dispiriting it can be to try and start a new career in your 50s. I also know how important services, like those provided by OVR, and supportive employers can be to workers with acquired disabilities trying to stay on the job or come back into the workforce after an absence.

As America's workforce grows older, more and more workers will face challenges like these and will need additional supports and accommodations. They will also need laws in place that ensure that when they walk into an interview they do not face any form of discrimination. When we make it easier for these workers to succeed, everyone benefits. I hope I have gotten that message across today.

Thank you again for the invitation to testify before the Committee, and I look forward to answering your questions.