

Good morning.

My name is Jamie Gudiel, and I am a Steering Committee member of the Our Children, Our Future Campaign.

The Our Children, Our Future Campaign is not one group, or one leader.

We are over 177 partners across the state – churches, community organizations, schools, unions, chambers of commerce, and everyday families like mine. *More than 400 of us have been here this week.*

We all pitch in time, money, and resources to reach our goal to end child poverty in West Virginia.

Our Campaign has helped win 13 victories in 2 years – from restoring Head Start and Child Care Cuts to expanding healthy food and physical activity in our schools to insuring 120,000 new working families.

We believe there are 4 reasons for that success.

First, we win because we do not speak on behalf of kids and families – we are kids and families, telling our stories locally and here in the state Capitol.

Second, we win because we stay united – the state Chamber of Commerce and AFL-CIO both served on our founding steering committee.

Our sponsors for this Symposium include everybody from the AARP and ACLU to the Catholic Diocese and WV FREE.

Please take a look at our full list of sponsors and policy victories ~~on the screen above me~~. *packet of issues we've talked about*

Third, we win because we work as hard as anybody – our partners have hosted 36 regional forums, over 100 community meetings, and dozens of conferences and trainings so that everyday people get a voice.

Last year, in the middle of a snow storm we had 812 kids and families in the Capitol for the largest turnout of any group during session.

Finally, we win because of you!

Sen. Unger, you were the first legislator to attend our Policy Workshops last year.

Since then, 57 legislators, 57 LEGISLATORS, including many of our strongest champions sitting in this room right now, have stepped up by speaking at an Our Children, Our Future event or sponsoring one of our supported pieces of legislation.

Republicans AND Democrats

You are our allies, welcoming families into this political process.

That same leadership brings us to today.

As you have heard, today's hearing is a little different.

First, I will give you an overview of the policy proposals that were put forward during yesterday's policy symposium.

We had 22 different policy sessions.

And the co-chairs of those sessions have been working hard all summer to craft their policy proposals and get them ready for this week.

After I finish giving you an overview of those proposals, you will hear from 6 West Virginians who are struggling in their own lives... but who are not giving up.

Our families are the real experts in this debate.

Following this formal testimony the Chairman has agreed to shake things up.

Following my remarks and the testimonies of 6 brave West Virginians, the committee will recess for 40 minutes... giving you an opportunity to circle around the room and meet with the leaders of the specific issue areas.

This is like speed-dating.

Maybe you're interested in sponsoring legislation on workplace bullying,

or maybe you want to talk strategy with the Juvenile Justice group,

do you think that people who earn lower wages should have the same access to savings as high wage workers?

or maybe you have a question for the folks who are working on Paid Sick Days.

This is your chance to do some match-making.

During this time, we hope to make a few marriages.

When the Chairman re-convenes the meeting we will take any question you may have.

I met some of you last session, when I came to the Capitol to speak about my experience as a minimum wage worker.

Thanks to your leadership, and to the Our Children, Our Future Campaign, and all of our partners, West Virginians like me will have a little bit more money to cover food and rent and utilities at the end of the month.

But I am here today, because our fight to end child poverty does not stop there.

And even though my issue was passed, I am committed to standing alongside everyone else in this room until every kid and every hardworking family in this state has a fair shot, and equal opportunity, to make a life for themselves in West Virginia.

We are here today to tell our stories

We are here today to have a voice in our government

We are here today to make sure you know that our votes and our voices count just as much as any high paid lobbyist.

And we are here today to show you that it's not just about working on one issue and patting ourselves on the back.

It's about the long haul.

For the last generation, West Virginia families have been under attack.

There are fewer jobs than there were 40 years ago.

Those jobs pay less than they did 40 years ago.

Those jobs are harder to get than ever before and harder to keep.

Meanwhile, the costs of things like health care, child care, and healthy food have skyrocketed.

With all the crisis in the economy, families are broken apart and split up as they search for the next job or try to cope with not having enough money to make ends meet.

Under all this stress, drugs and obesity are ravaging our communities.

Worst of all, social support institutions, like churches and unions and extended families, are crumbling.

You have a handout today with our 22 proposals [SHOW HANDOUT].

Think of our 22 issues as an attempt to start defending our families from these attacks.

These issues are about rebuilding that community of support around West Virginia families.

But there is no silver bullet.

And even if we won on all of these issues, we would still have a long way to go. We will not reverse 40 years of attacks on families in 1 year, or even 2 or 3 years.

But we are here today to start.

Reversing these attacks will mean getting more and better jobs in West Virginia, it will mean making the healthy choice the easy choice, it will mean tackling drugs head-on, and it will mean paying special attention to our most vulnerable kids.

Some issues focus on jobs, creating more jobs and making the jobs we have better with the same benefits as high wage workers have or you as legislators have here at the capitol.

Some issues focus on preserving our health. Did you know that West Virginians spends \$3 billion every year on chronic disease treatment associated with obesity?

That's \$3 billion on preventable diseases our whole state budget is \$4 billion.

Until we figure out a way to cut health care costs and make people healthier, we won't have any money left for economic development.

That's why health is important, and why we are focused on it in many of the policy recommendations including an increase in the tobacco tax and farmers market expansion.

Some issues focus on drugs. Drugs destroy lives, especially the lives of poor families and kids.

Some issues focus on helping our most vulnerable kids. It's our job to protect them so they can grow into productive, happy grown-ups.

At the end of the day, all the issues are about fighting so that every kid in our state has a fair shot.

Thank you for your time and attention today. And remember, we are always getting stronger. The stories you hear are not just about people who are struggling to get by. Our stories are about how we are getting organized and mobilizing our communities.

Since last year, we have continued to grow. This summer, with our partner project called Try This, we helped to fund 42 mini-grant healthy lifestyles projects around the state and develop a website, trythiswv.com, so that anybody can go on-line and learn how they can make a difference in their own communities. We have also just launched a project called Our Vote, Our Future. Starting on Monday, we will have 9 paid field organizers who will be registering voters, knocking on doors, and increasing voter turnout in close house and senate races during the election... and beyond.

Together, with your help, and with the leadership of the people in this room, we continue to get stronger.

It is now my pleasure to introduce [Name} from [town]

Soon we found a place to live and I landed an assistant manager position at a fast food place.

Things were really looking up and I was proud of myself.

The job was hard work and had crazy hours but that didn't matter.

It was enough money to sustain my family and I even had an opportunity to save for retirement with a 401K they offered at work.

One month into training, my son came down with whooping cough.

I got a call from the baby sitter telling me my 3 month old baby couldn't breathe!

We went to the emergency room that night and didn't leave the hospital until late the following day.

When I was able to go back to work the manager asked me if I wanted to work extra to make up my hours or take a dock in pay, I chose to take the cut in hours. I knew I could not make up those hours and be able to take care of a sick infant and my other two children.

Not long after our conversation I was fired.

If West Virginia allowed workers to have Paid Sick Days, I might still have that job.

That was rock-bottom for me.

Thank Goodness for my family resource specialist with head start. She was always looking out for us and making sure we were ok. She was the one who connected us with Early Head Start. My youngest son was soon signed up and we were getting bi-weekly visits in our home by a family service specialist.

I really looked forward to her visits.

I finally had an adult to talk to even if it was about my baby, it didn't matter.

Today my youngest child is four and through all of this they are obviously my motivation to make things better.

You are probably wondering where my husband was during all of this?

In 2010 my husband was an illegal immigrant. In January of 2010 I lost my job and my husband was deported, even though we were married. I depleted my 401K working to ensure he could return to the United States it was not easy but almost a year later he was granted permanent residence status and my life as a single married mother was finally over.

My husband is living the American dream, working hard, giving back to his family, but we still struggle to make ends meet.

We have jobs but we don't have the kind of jobs that allow you to save for the future like I once had.

We aren't here today to tell sob stories.

Before we dive in I would like to briefly share my own story.

5 years ago, I was penniless, unemployed, and alone with two children under the age of four and eight and a half months pregnant with my third child.

That's when I moved back to West Virginia.

The minute we arrived in Morgantown, my home town, I had to hit the ground running.

There was no time to feel sorry for myself.

Thankfully I had a small support system to help me get to all the right places and get my kids the support they needed.

I had no idea what I needed to get done before the baby arrived and I didn't have a clue how to apply for services.

It was my first time being poor.

It was very difficult to walk into DHHR and apply for assistance.

For me, it meant I had to admit to myself that I was there because I failed miserably at life.

It wasn't long after that I found myself alone in active labor pacing the floor of the hospital room waiting for the birth of my third child.

The room was beautiful and the doctor and nurses were very nice to me, but in between the nurses coming in and the relentless labor pains I was trying to figure out how I was going to be a single mother to three small children.

I knew my families future was hanging in the balance and the weight of those responsibilities were almost too much to bear.

People say that poor people are lazy.

It's the opposite.

People who don't have a lot of money, like me, are constantly rushing around all the time.

I have no free time, not even to think.

It's one crisis after another.

The baby was born I was out of the hospital and once again there was no time to spare. Of course, I had no maternity leave.

It was time to find a job and a place to call our own.

I knew it was going to be a challenge, but I never expected to be turned down for an apartment because I had children or because my only source of income was unemployment.