

Testimony of Ruth Riley
Former WNBA Athlete, Olympic Gold Medalist
Before the House Agriculture Committee, Nutrition Subcommittee
October 27, 2015

Good morning Chairwoman Walorski, Ranking Member McGovern and members of the Committee. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share my experience on the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or what my family called “food stamps.”

This is an issue that is woven into the fabric of my childhood. My father walked out when I was 4 years old. He left my mom to raise my sister, brother and I on her own. She found herself doing whatever blue collar work she could find to provide for us. It wasn't easy. Besides the rare instances I would wake up in the night to find my mom crying at the kitchen table as she was trying to navigate our family's finances, I was pretty oblivious, as most kids are, to the level of poverty we were living in.

I knew there were some times when my mom paid for our groceries with what looked like monopoly money instead of cash. Off and on throughout my childhood I would have a little ticket that got me a free breakfast or lunch at school. But as a kid, I had limited knowledge of food stamps or free and reduced price school meals. I just knew that, somehow, when we needed it, there was always food.

Because I had this food, I was able to learn and focus in school, which ultimately led me to graduate with honors from the University of Notre Dame. It also fueled my real passion. Basketball. I'm grateful and proud of the success I've had in winning championships at the collegiate, professional, and Olympic levels. I often joke that growing up I was tall, lanky and uncoordinated. Looking back, I can't imagine what my path would have been if I'd been tall, lanky, uncoordinated...and hungry. When times were tough, the nutrition I received through programs like food stamps and school meals helped me grow stronger. It saw me through all the numerous hours of training before and after school, lifting with the football coaches and playing pick-up games with the guys. It was all physically demanding and I could not have done it if I hadn't had enough to eat.

We live in a land of wealth and opportunity, so acknowledging that one in five children in this country lives in a family struggling to put enough food on the table is hard. It's easy to feel compassion about hungry children when it's in the abstract, but it's tough to admit that our next-door neighbor's children might not have the food they need to thrive. I say thrive because, in America, it's often not the case of life or death or survival. It's the fact that kids don't have the nutrition they need to learn and physically grow. By not providing them with that, as a society, we're also not providing them with the opportunity to be successful, to go to college, and to break the cycle of poverty instead of getting stuck in it. We talk about educational reform, but we don't talk about the fact that hungry kids can't concentrate and learn. We talk about health care, but we don't talk about the stunted development and avoidable health issues that rise from a lack of proper nutrition. We talk about jobs, but we overlook the impact that hunger-related issues have on creating a job-ready generation.

SNAP is critical to ending childhood hunger. I can tell you, first hand, that when programs like SNAP work in tandem with other programs like school meals, we can make sure that kids are getting the three meals a day they need to grow up strong. For example, school breakfast ensures that kids can start their days with a healthy meal to fuel their brains, while also allowing parents to stretch SNAP dollars longer into the month instead of running out early. This way, even when money is extremely tight, we can guarantee that kids are still getting the healthy food they need.

My mom taught me to dream big and then to work extremely hard to achieve those dreams. My dream as a little girl growing up on a farm in Indiana was to play in the Olympics, and I was fortunate to see that dream fulfilled in Athens in 2004 as I stood on the podium to receive my gold medal. Today, my dream is equally as bold, and I believe, achievable. I want to see a nation in which no child goes hungry. A nation where every child has the ability to get the nutrition they need to grow up smart and strong. A nation where every little girl dares to dream her dreams, and also gets the food and support she needs to grow up and achieve them.

Ruth Riley played on the 2001 University of Notre Dame women's basketball national championship team, won the WNBA Championship with the Detroit Shock, and was part of the 2004 gold medal winning Olympic team. Before her time on the basketball court, Ruth was raised in a single-parent household that relied on the food stamps, and free- and reduced-priced lunches. Because of this experience, in 2012, Ruth became an ambassador for Share Our Strength, a nonprofit that is committed to ending childhood hunger, as part of their No Kid Hungry campaign. Ruth continues to advocate for child nutrition programs across the country.

**Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses**

House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Ruth Riley

2. Organization you represent:

3. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee: _____

4. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee: _____

5. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

**Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form**

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since January 1, 2013.

Name: Ruth Riley

Organization you represent (if any): NBA Cares

- 1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since January 1, 2013, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:**

Source: _____ **Amount:** _____

Source: _____ **Amount:** _____

- 2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since January 1, 2013, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:**

Source: _____ **Amount:** _____

Source: _____ **Amount:** _____

- 3. Please list any payment or contract originating with a foreign government (including subcontracts) you have received since January 1, 2013, as well as the country of origin and amount of each payment or contract.**

Country of Origin: _____ **Amount:** _____

Country of Origin: _____ **Amount:** _____

- 4. Please list any payment or contract originating with a foreign government (including subcontracts) the organization has received since January 1, 2013, as well as the country of origin and amount of each payment or contract.**

Country of Origin: _____ **Amount:** _____

Country of Origin: _____ **Amount:** _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you:



Signature: _____

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the current calendar year or either of the two previous calendar years by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B) shall include--(i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness appears.

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.