

Oral Testimony given by Josephine McEntee

The Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty Public Hearing

31 August 2011

I am a statistic. Laid off my \$60k a year technology job in 2009, I am a black woman, 59 years old, who has exhausted my unemployment benefits, depleted my savings and have depended upon selling my plasma to exist. I am too young for retirement and too old for many trade programs.

Beyond those statistics, what I am is a resilient individual. I am a baby-boomer. I have lived through Woodstock, Viet Nam, recessions, Malcolm's and King's assassinations, political scandals, Face Book and Twitter, and numerous personal losses. I have weathered many a storm and emerged victorious.

The Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty has defined an agenda that aggressively attacks poverty as a human rights violation. The Commission outlines a process for workforce re-entry, educational assistance and financial support. These processes have been overhauled before, with varying degrees of success and failure. I believe it is time to look at new ways of attacking poverty.

The elimination of poverty and the financial recovery of our communities go hand-in-hand. I believe individual empowerment will be a key factor to achieving this goal. For me, and many others, we are ready to take charge of our lives and build on our experiences and visions. Personally, I would like to see the Commission harness the entrepreneurial spirit of Englewood (and other communities). Make funds and support systems available for small businesses to develop and prosper.

The path to dignity and work has room to include innovative approaches. I would like the Commission to modify its blueprint to include support for growing sustainable food sources in the community. Urban gardens and aquaponics offer dignity and work in a way that directly addresses the issues of poverty and the lack of food. Englewood is definitely up to the task. We are capable of creating wealth and revitalizing our community – with just a little help.

Is it too simplistic and naïve to believe that developing and supporting a nutrient-rich food source, which leads to a better diet, which leads to better health, which reduces health care costs, which frees resources to further education and other innovative solutions is not an attainable goal? Can we make the development of a sustainable community food source a part of the Food and Nutrition Work Plan?

Empower us to help ourselves.

Yes, I am a statistic. I am also one of many small businesses that have grown out of this recession – small businesses that have the potential impact to bring our communities, our state and this nation back from the bleak economic portrait of the day – with just a little help.

Can we count on you?