EXHIBIT 18
DATE 1-21-05

Madam Chairperson and members of the committee

My name is Amber Thebo and this is my son Izekial. I am a single mother of one child, I am also a TANF participant.

I am working hard on my GED and I take my test on February 8th.

I am looking forward to furthering my education so I can get a good paying job.

I know that there is a 23 million dollar surplus in TANF funds. I am here to ask this committee to restore cash benefits for families struggling to be self-sufficient.

Before the cut, I was receiving 478 dollars a month and now I receive 298 dollars for me and my son to live on. It is very hard to make ends meet, Izekial and I struggle everyday just to get our feet out the door.

My TANF check has to cover my basic utilities, car insurance, childcare payments and all of my needs for Izekial. Diapers, wipes and medicine and other needs have to be doubled so that he has what he needs at daycare. Food stamps do not buy any of these things.

By the middle of the month, I struggle to know whether I will have enough at the end of the month to make it to my next check. I don't know if I will have enough money for gas to make it to school and work or to take my son to daycare. I never know if I will have enough money to buy him cold medicine when he is sick or to buy him clothes or a toy he really wants.

Christmas time was so hard for us because I was not able to save enough money to buy the choo, choo train that Izekial wanted or even to buy a Christmas tree.

It felt so bad when Izekial asked "Mommy, where's our Christmas tree."

It makes me upset that there is money available in the TANF fund that is not going to families who need it. There would be so many more successful people moving out of poverty, if they were able to meet their needs on TANF, get job training or go to school.

I want to become a self-sufficient mother and I want to get my education, but I need a little more help to get there.

Thank you.