

SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY	
EXHIBIT NO.	8
DATE:	3-9-5
BILL NO.	H 3555

Public Health, Safety and Welfare Committee Members:

I am writing in support of HB 555, "parents as scholars." I believe this to be an important legislative bill that can contribute to the ending of poverty in Montana. I also believe this bill will contribute to the decline of welfare dependency.

As a means of illustrating my support, I would like to share my story. I am the single mother of two children. My children and I are survivors of homelessness and domestic violence. When I divorced, in 1999, I applied for welfare assistance. While I was receiving cash benefits, I applied to be a PSE (post-secondary education) recipient. The process for receiving the education waiver helped to direct my interests and allowed me to evaluate what I wanted to accomplish in attending the University of Montana. I was approved to be a PSE student in Missoula county and began attending school.

As a student, I obtained a work-study position at the Mansfield library and began attending classes. My first semester was rocky as my kids and I adjusted to the new schedule. However, my subsequent semesters at UM I earned high grades and was on the Dean's list. Additionally, I earned three scholarships that paid a considerable portion of my expenses for the last two years of my BA degree. I ultimately completed by B.A. in three years rather than four. I was also accepted into the Masters program in history. Once my B.A. was completed, I closed my cash assistance grant and continued my employment at the Mansfield library while simultaneously working for Dr. Harry Fritz as a grader in the History department. I am now nearing completion of my Masters degree. I was able to accomplish these educational goals and benchmarks because of the PSE program.

I will be competing my thesis in April of this year and then I will find a job and use my education. I believe that if I had not had the opportunity to use school for my work hours while on cash assistance, I would be working in a fast food restaurant making minimal wages with no possibility of getting my family out of the cycle of poverty. I firmly believe that education is the key to ending welfare dependency. An educated populace is an employable populace and an employable populace is a taxable populace.

Sincerely,  
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