

November 9, 2009

The Honorable Lynn Woolsey  
Chair, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections  
Committee on Education and Labor  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6100

My name is Claudia Zamorano. I am the mother of two beautiful children, Alicia Daniela, age 11 and Alexander, age 4. Never in my life did I expect to be standing before you telling you my story. Just two years ago I had a family, a home, a business – the so-called American Dream but since then it has taken a 180 degree turn. Now I stand here empty handed because I lost it all in a divorce.

I did not understand how hard people really had it until I had to live it. I am not a woman that likes to just sit around, so I enrolled myself in cosmetology school and completed it. However, I have not been able to continue with my training and apply for the state board license because I spent my savings on my schooling and now I struggle to pay for the license and finish what I studied so hard for. I went to school to get us out of where we are today. But in order to succeed I would have to be away from my children 40 hours a week to build a clientele and I cannot afford the cost of childcare while doing it! So right now I can only work part time as a nanny to make ends meet – and it is a struggle everyday. That is the irony of it all. I work to support another family so they can have work/life balance, but I do not have that same option for myself. Since last January I have been on a list waiting to receive child care assistance. How long must I wait? If I had child care I could work more and I could pay more taxes. The money I made I would spend on bills, groceries, rent, which are all things that help my local economy. And my son would be in an environment where he can develop and be with qualified caregivers who would give him the necessities when I cannot be there.

I have been very lucky to have my parents help with my kids while I work, but it is getting harder and harder because I know they are getting older, they have their own health problems, and the money I provide to them is not enough. I wake up every morning not knowing if my parents will be able to take care of my kids or who I will be able to leave them with in order to make money to survive. The stress has made it very difficult for me, emotionally, mentally, and physically. I have somehow managed to put together a fragile puzzle to take care of my kids, but that's just it, it could fall a part at any moment.

I do not have the option to stay home and care for my kids. My ex-husband works off and on, especially in this bad economy so he gives us support when he can, but it is not reliable. I cannot count on him for support so I must work. I'm here today to ask this Committee to consider policies that support working mothers like me. We need quality affordable child care so please increase federal child care funding. We need health care. I have gone without health care insurance for 2 years. If I have a major illness I don't

know what I would do. And we need paid sick days! Thankfully my employer now gives me sick days, but I've worked many jobs when I didn't have them. With all this talk about swine flu, working mothers need to be able to take time off to care for our children if they get sick or if their school closes. We also need flexible work schedules. If my son is sick and my father can't pick him up, I have to get him. My employer has been flexible in the past but I'm afraid that if I keep asking then I could risk losing my job.

Please don't take me wrong – I am not asking for a freebie. I am asking that child care and health care be affordable for all! I want to feel my kids are safe and I am able to work towards my career goals like everyone else. I'm very proud of my daughter because last week she was chosen from her School as one of 15 out of 600 students for achieving excellent grades. I want my children to be somebody and leave a mark in this country, what is now my country that I love and respect. But I dislike the fact that my kids see me struggle. And I stand here on behalf of all those working mothers that now struggle and for the more like me to come. For all those mothers who put their kids to bed and then stay up hours stressed, nervous, scared about what they will do to give their children a better life. We all need peace of mind. One thing is for sure, I am not a leech! I am not a parasite! I am Claudia Zamorano! A woman, a warrior, but first of all a mother!

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.