

Testimony of Prepedigma 'Cora' McDonnell

House Ways and Means Committee, Social Security Subcommittee Hearing on "Equity in Social Security:  
In Their Own Words"

June 15, 2021

Hello, and thank you for inviting me to share with the committee my experiences of how Social Security has affected my life. My name is Prepedigma McDonnell and I am 79-years-old. I am a devout Catholic and proud daughter of a World War II veteran.

My father, Jose Dumpit Pacis was awarded the Purple Heart as a member of the Filipino US Army Forces in the Far East. He was a former prisoner of war and a survivor of the Bataan Death March during the war.

He was eventually able to receive his U.S. citizenship when he came to this country with my mother in 1983. I joined them shortly thereafter in 1985 to settle down in Seattle, Washington where I have been ever since.

I was 43 years old when I first arrived and was fortunate to start a family with the birth of my son in 1986. It was a blessing from God to be raising my child here and given the opportunity to pursue our American dream. I began working in retail to help support my family and eventually landed a job as a billing clerk for Airborne Express.

But then my life came crashing down when my husband was diagnosed with Pseudo-myoxoma-peritonei, a rare form of cancer in 1994. After several surgeries and years of chemotherapy, he eventually became bedridden and had to be cared for at home by my aging parents.

My husband lost his battle to cancer and passed away in 1998. Two years later, my mother passed away and two years following her passing, my father joined them in Heaven. Then I was laid off from Airborne Express in 2003 after 14 years of employment when it was acquired by DHL.

In a five-year span, I lost my husband, mother, father, and job. It was the most difficult period in my life where I felt so helpless and alone. My faith in God, the belief that He always provides, helped pulled me through and kept me going.

Fortunately, I began receiving my husband's survivor benefits after his passing up until 2006 when I became eligible for my own Social Security benefits. Without Social Security, I could not have survived; I would have been homeless and unable to provide for my young son and his medical condition. My son has been dealing with autoimmune issues throughout his childhood and missed many days of school due to his treatment for ulcerative colitis and severe eczema. Social Security was essential as a single working mother and more so when I became unemployed.

I was able to work again through the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging's Senior Community Service Employment Program and have been employed since 2004. Even though I am employed, Social Security pays the bills, keeps food on the table for me and my son, and a roof over our heads. Without the income from my job, I would be struggling to survive. I wonder why benefits have remained nearly unchanged over the past 20 years despite the costs of living getting higher and higher.

The pandemic and the attacks on the Asian community have me scared to leave my home. But my church has reopened, and God speaks to me and tells me I must continue to do His work. I pray I am allowed to do that for as long as I physically can. Thank you for listening.