

Testimony of Mary Widmier, Ed.D.
Hearing on “Equity in Social Security: In Their Own Words”
Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security
June 15, 2021

Chairman Larson, Ranking Member Reed, and all Committee Members:

My name is Mary Widmier, and I am a resident of the Greater Houston area in the great state of Texas. I speak as a retired educator, having worked in public education for more than 36 years. I retired 13 years ago and am now a member of the Texas Retired Teachers Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my remarks with the committee today in support of changes to the Windfall Elimination Provision of Social Security.

My story is similar to many others. I grew up in rural Central Texas, the oldest of 3 in my family of modest means and the first to go to college. I always loved school and had some amazing teachers who convinced me that I could pursue life outside of my small town with no limits. With no savings or funding for my education, I started working at the age of 16, saving all that I could, applying for scholarships, and working as a college intern for NASA, at the Johnson Space Center during Apollo 11 and 12, until I graduated with a degree in Mathematics and Physics at the University of Houston.

My love of school attracted me to apply for a teaching position and I became a high school math teacher. When I decided to pursue graduate studies, I recall a conversation with my brother who was a mechanical engineer. He suggested I use my background and college credits in Math to pursue an engineering degree. However, I told him I loved teaching and would stay in public education. Eventually, with both a Masters and Doctorate in Education I moved on to being a high school assistant principal, a director of staff development and eventually Superintendent of Human Resources. All along the way I continued with other employment, either with summer jobs in the private sector or teaching evening classes at local universities.

So now I find myself retired, receiving a pension through the Teacher Retirement System in Texas to which I contributed for 36 years. However, I also have 21 years of private sector employment at various times, either before, during or after my employment as a public servant. My contributions into Social Security during this employment are impacted by the WEP. I receive less than \$120 a month which is automatically applied to my billing for Medicare, Part B.

I would also like to share the story of my oldest son. After high school and a couple of years of college he served our country as a Marine for 5 years. He later finished his degree, all while working part-time and found full-time employment in the insurance industry as an insurance adjuster. He hated it. He changed careers at the age of 37 and is now a middle school history teacher. He now loves his job, his school and his students. However, to maximize his teacher pension he will likely be working until the age of 67 and, unless the WEP is changed, he will not receive his fair share for years of significant, full-time employment prior to becoming a teacher.

There are thousands of stories out there of a similar nature. I have a close friend who was a teacher in other states before ending her career in Texas. She retired assuming that she would

be able to draw retirement from her Texas pension and Social Security from her earnings elsewhere. She was wrong and has been greatly impacted. Another friend volunteers at a local food pantry and is appalled to see retired educators coming in for assistance, just to make ends meet.

Most public servants chose their profession either as teachers, police officers, fire fighters, or in local government because they want to give back to their communities and their country. They understand that their income could be higher in a different profession, but they are devoted to public service. Should their conscious choice to follow their calling for limited earnings also impact their retirement?

In closing, I also want to speak of my personal interest in the future of the teaching profession. Now, more than ever, we need teachers who genuinely want to be there and who make it their life-long career. They should not be penalized for making a conscious choice to serve our nation's children. We are not asking for more than we paid into the system. We are simply asking for a more equitable formula. We believe that *The Public Servant Protection and Fairness Act of 2021* sponsored by Chairman Neal and the *Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act of 2019* sponsored by Ranking Member Brady will accomplish this and we hope they can work together to pass legislation to finally fix the WEP. I can assure you that not one of us who is affected believe that receiving our portion of Social Security is in any way "a windfall."

Thank you, Congressman Neal, Congressman Brady, and others who have been working tirelessly in hopes of bringing about more fairness to the WEP. I would also like to thank my own Congressman, Dan Crenshaw, for showing his support of this legislation.

Thank you all for your time.

Mary Widmier, Ed.D.