

Paula Porter
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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Paula Porter and I am 80 years old. I retired from Terrebonne Parish School System after teaching for 38 years. Except for 4 years, all of my teaching was done in Terrebonne Parish School System, mostly in the field of science.

My husband started paying into the Social Security System as a teenager when he worked in his parents "mom and pop" drug store. I met Howard when I was a teacher. He also taught briefly, but went to work in the oil field industry so that we could make ends meet. He died of cancer in 1985 at the age of 61, leaving me with five children ages 10 to 15, hospital bills, and a mortgage. He never was able to draw one dollar of his own Social Security.

When he died I was 42 years old and for whatever reason there was, I did not qualify for a widow's benefit. With the loss of his income, I started working after school jobs within the school system. Some of the jobs I worked were Homework Hotline, Saturday School, Leap Remediation, and did some tutoring. I had family, but none of them lived in the area so the responsibility of working, caring for the children, and the household duties all fell on me.

I retired after 26 years at the age of 56 thinking I would just work part time, but I found out from another teacher I would not be able to draw any of my husband's Social Security. I went Social Security office to verify this and found out it was true. So I was compelled to return to work.

I taught for another 12 years. After this, unable to qualify for a Social Security benefit from my husband nor from my own contributions to Social Security, I had to continue to work. I worked with The Ability to Benefit Testing program and when that was discontinued, I started working in a local education supply store. Only after that business was sold did I completely stop working outside of the home. By then I was 74 years old.

Shortly after completely retiring, my youngest son was hurt doing contract labor. He developed not only physical problems but also had a mental breakdown. He cannot drive and in addition to health issues he has a below the knee amputation. He lives with me at home and is dependent on me in many ways physically, emotionally, and financially.

I always believed I should have received a benefit that my husband's Social Security contributions would have given me. Just because I chose a career in education I am denied a benefit that I may have otherwise qualified for if I were not a teacher. Life would have been so much easier. I am grateful to God for what I have and proud of what my five children have accomplished, but I remain concerned for those who may not be as blessed as I am and may need to depend on what WEP/GPO takes away.