

Hello, and thank you for your time today. My name is Charlene DuBuque and I'm a mom of four from Ballston Spa. I've been using the gig economy to supplement my household's income for over 10 years now. By chance, I learned about VIPKid this summer and the rest is history. Since then I've been on an amazing journey that's taken me on a virtual road trip across China, allowed me to pay off debt, and offered me the flexibility to care for my children on my own terms.

VIPKid is a digital platform that connects online teachers North America with children in China who wish to learn English. Nationwide, there are over 100,000 teachers on the VIPKid platform, teaching over 700,000 students in China. And this number is only expected to grow. In New York State alone, over 3,000 teachers currently contract with VIPKid. 90% of VIPKid teachers are women and a good number are stay at home moms. Here is my experience and why I'm passionate about VIPKid and what we do.

First, the money is fantastic! I make far more with VIPKid than I was ever able to make in any previous full or part-time job and I am without the financial or physical burden of a commute.

The experience has been phenomenal and I've acquired some amazing and loyal students. Connecting outside the VIPKid platform, these

same students have become cherished friends with my own children. Without VIPKid, this would never have been possible.

But what I love best about VIPKid is the flexibility I have. I can pick my own hours and work as little or as much as I need to. Despite having a BA and MA in history, I've been working in the gig economy for years now. As a mother of a son with some significant mental health needs, which at one point required a 7-week hospitalization, a conventional full or part time job is not an option. My son is prone to aggression and as a result I need to be available for constant doctor visits, a strict medication regiment, and to maintain a reliable schedule. It's imperative that I'm a mother first, a worker second.

Many mothers have a decision to make: go to work and put your young children in daycare, or stay at home and forgo any income. This decision is made even more difficult when you factor in the rising cost of childcare. When my husband and I did the math, had I taken a traditional full-time job we would have basically broke even after childcare costs, which means I would get the worst of both worlds: I would lose my time with my family AND any valuable income. The gig industry has provided many with a third option – non-traditional work with flexible scheduling.

This autonomy over my own schedule is what attracted me to VIPKid, I am able to make money on my own time and under my own terms. If I want to pick up extra work to save for a trip or pay down student loan debt, I can do it. If I want to take a couple weeks off or work a different “gig,” there is no penalty and I pick right up where I left off. I don’t want to be an employee. I value being my own boss.

As I stated, I’ve been using gig “like” work to supplement my household’s income for a while. I’ve run a successful direct sales business selling children’s books for almost 7 years and I freelance teach at a local museum. When business is slow during the off-season months, I’m able to pick up more classes with VIPKid so we have a steady flow of income coming in. When it’s book fair season, I can tone down the number of classes I want to teach that week. When the museum needs me for programs, I’m available. That is the beauty in flexible work – we choose how and when we work, often doing what we love to do.

I want people to see that flexible work provides more than just a “gig” opportunity. Stay at home moms like myself are gaining experience so should we ever decide to return to conventional work, we have the skills needed to get back into things. With VIPKid, I can be an ESL

teacher without the need for a computer programmer or franchise fee. I'm provided a platform to market my unique teaching style to a large established pool of future customers. The students I teach picked me and they return to me because of the brand I've worked hard to create and maintain.

A few months ago, I was having lunch with a friend and she said to me, "Charlene, you just seem happier." Though I've been with VIPKid only six months, the experience has really changed my family for the better. We don't stress about money like we used to and we've been able to pay down quite a bit of debt. And I just love what I do. I find value and pride in teaching and being part of the VIPKid community. I ask that you consider how some of this legislation might impact mothers like me in New York. Thank you for your time.