



Oregon

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MEASURE: HB 4082
EXHIBIT: 70
2012 SESSION H HUMAN SERVICES
DATE: 2/6/12 PAGES: 3
SUBMITTED BY: Rick Crager



Testimony of
Rick Crager, Deputy Director
Oregon Housing and Community Services
before the
House Committee on Human Services
February 6, 2012
House Bill 4082

Co-Chair Tomei, Co-Chair Gilliam, and members of the committee, for the record I am Rick Crager, Deputy Director with Oregon Housing and Community Services. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 4082 and the -4 amendments.

House Bill 4082 provides for the transfer of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program to the Oregon Volunteers Commission for Voluntary Action and Services, otherwise known as Oregon Volunteers. Oregon Volunteers is administered through the budget of Oregon Housing and Community Services and has been a part of the Department since 2001. This has been a very successful relationship over the last eleven years. Together, we have worked to promote and support AmeriCorps, volunteerism, and civic engagement in an effort to strengthen Oregon communities. Oregon Volunteers was established in accordance with the federal National Community Service Trust Act of 1993, and receives its funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service.



When the staff and commission members of Oregon Volunteers evaluated the request from the Task Force to consider this transfer, it was commonly agreed that the volunteer model employed by CASA would fit within the organization's mission and would certainly complement their work in implementing the 2007 Oregon Volunteer and Service Act.

Aside from the mission fit of CASA to the organization's volunteerism goals, Oregon Volunteers also brings 17 years of experience in managing complex federal grants and building capacity of nonprofit organizations. All of the work of Oregon Volunteers supports public and private entities that use service and volunteerism as a mechanism to strengthen Oregon communities. Oregon Volunteers' administrative and grant management structures are nationally recognized for their strength.

In addition to the strong capacity building and oversight structure that will result from this transition, House Bill 4082 will also provide time for all the key stakeholders of CASA to develop a proposal that allows for long-term sustainability of the program, along with the permanent placement within an organization best suited to meet the desired outcomes.

In order for House Bill 4082 to be successful, it will require the appropriate level of financial support for Oregon Volunteers to administer the responsibilities outlined in the bill. Currently, Oregon Volunteers has a budgeted staff of 3.5 FTE; however, recent federal reductions to Oregon Volunteers has required cuts to an already small administrative budget. Without any additional funding, Oregon Volunteers simply will not have the capacity to administer the CASA program.

Through the -4 amendment of House Bill 4082, OHCS believes the responsibilities for Oregon Volunteers has been defined more clearly. While there is still a fiscal impact, it is greatly reduced from what was estimated in the original version of the bill. In addition, there have been greater responsibilities for training and establishing program standards assigned to the Oregon CASA Network. Oregon Volunteers will provide the oversight and approval for these responsibilities, while still assuring accountability through contracting, reporting, accounting, and compliance.

We are very appreciative of the work of Representative Thompson and the other members of the task force who have worked diligently in creating this proposal. With the passage of House Bill 4082-4, we believe OHCS and Oregon Volunteers can successfully contribute to the administration of CASA until a long-term sustainability plan can be developed.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent Housing and Community Services before the committee today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.