



Taking action for basic human needs.



Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
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Co-Chairs of the Human Services Coalition of Oregon

Good afternoon Representative Nathanson and Senator Bates, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Andy Smith and I am testifying today as a Co-Chair of the Human Services Coalition of Oregon.

“HSCO” as we call ourselves, is a big tent, umbrella coalition of comprised of more than 80 organizations who advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable citizens in our state. HSCO has deep roots in this building and takes great pride our work over the last 20 years. Our work includes advocacy for seniors, for stable housing, for mental health and addictions services, for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, for affordable and accessible daycare, child welfare, domestic violence prevention, health care and for a variety of other basic human services.

We believe in an Oregon where we take care of our neighbors with low incomes, our seniors and people with disabilities, and families with children. Every child should have the opportunity to be healthy, safe and be afforded the family stability to succeed in school and in life.

HSCO fulfills our mission by:

- Organizing a broad array of interests to work towards common goals and ensure adequate public and private resources for vital programs and services
- Educating ourselves, our communities and decision makers
- Advocating at the local, state and national level

Why are we testifying today?

First, we want to thank you for your leadership as human services advocates yourselves. Many in our HSCO world have been able to work closely with you in recent years and have great respect for the often frustrating, and ongoing struggle you have to prioritize and address the needs our most vulnerable. In prior public testimony before various committees, we have seen you be touched by the compelling stories of Oregonians who have shared the stark realities of their everyday lives. Over the last two months during OHA and DHS agency briefings, your thorough engagement and attention to detail has been very evident. Thank you.

Further, we want to thank the Full Ways and Means Co-Chairs for their dedication and hard work on behalf of all Oregonians. We support the much needed investment the Co-Chairs have targeted for education; for smart, results oriented reforms to our public safety system that holds people accountable and maximizes limited resources; and for the all-out commitment we’re making to achieve the healthcare triple aim.

That being said, as HSCO leaders, we think there is another yardstick to the work we all do.

As former Vice President Hubert Humphrey described so poignantly in 1976:

“The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy and the handicapped. ”

Since the beginning of the Great Recession tens of thousands Oregonians---if not many more----- have been thrown into the tenacious whirl of a faltering economy. Low income and middle class families have suffered catastrophic loss of

their incomes, exhaustion of their limited savings and in many cases, their homes. These realities affect not only the fiscal health of our states families, but also their emotional well-being, their physical health and their ability to succeed in getting an education and in staying employed in the changing economy.

As you know, there is an inverse relationship between the need for safety net programs and the economy.

While the economy may be getting better for some in Oregon, for our most vulnerable a return to sense of normalcy is a long way off and needs remains very high. Let me share a few examples:

- In 2008 about 215,000 Oregonians relied on the SNAP programs to make their most basic food needs; at the end of 2012 that number still hovered at about 400,000.
- In 2008, about 18,000 families received TANF benefits; at the end of 2012 about 35,000 families relied on this program. Notably however, while more families need this help, because of budget constraints only, 15% of these families receive critical supportive services such as the JOBS program.
- We have had to cap enrollment in Employment Related Day Care services at about 8,000 families, even though thousands are lined up this program.
- In the DD system, key resource levels in the brokerage system have been frozen for 10 years without COLAS----and continuously been whittled away by inflation.
- In Child Welfare, as mentioned by your panel of guests yesterday, the number of foster care workers per child has almost tripled from about 25 per case worker to about 70 per case worker in recent years. Where do many of these foster kids go when our foster system fails them----they go under bridges, they go to our emergency rooms, they go to our jails and prisons; ultimately they often repeat the cycle of poverty and abuse they have suffered in their own lives.

It's not in easy times of relative abundance that we should judge ourselves. It's in times like today.

HSCO wants to acknowledge openly that you've been dealt a tough hand----a very formidable hole of \$125 million hole in the Human Services budget.

What can you do?

- Don't give up advocating for resources to help fill this hole-----what makes the \$275 million target for tax expenditures savings a magic number? Consider that there are about \$12.5 billion of tax expenditures or "tax breaks" as I think they should be referred to, built into in current our income tax system; there are about \$23.5 billion of tax breaks in built into our property tax system. Why should this target not be \$300 million, or even \$375 million...or even much more?
- If the new revenue forecast yields new revenue---and doesn't kick, start making the case now that a substantial portion of these resources should be aimed directly at filling the Human Services hole in the budget.
- Within the Human Services family of OHA and DHS, work hard to spread the impact of any reductions across both of these agencies, with a keen eye on the impact to frontline services.
- Entertain any other ideas in administrative savings to help make the math work, but that doesn't have to be borne on the shoulders of our most vulnerable.
- Use some the Rainy day fund---for many of our most vulnerable Oregonians it's raining now.....and it's been raining especially hard for the last 4 years.

This Subcommittee's budget won't balance itself and there are no easy answers for you or for the Co-Chairs of the Full Committee. That being said, as leaders of HSCO we urge you to listen closely to the stories you'll hear today and to remember the real lives that are being impacted by your decisions. HSCO believes this budget is our collective call to action and we ask for your leadership in this work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.