



Urban League
of Portland

MEASURE: HB 3436
EXHIBIT: 24
H BUSINESS & LABOR
DATE: 3/15/2013 PAGES: 1
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Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee; My name is Norma Mullen, Director of the Urban League Senior Services program. Our program has been providing services to seniors for nearly 40 years. About 75% of the clients we serve are African Americans, while 25% reflect our diverse population in the County. All of the seniors that we serve are low income. Most of our seniors live solely on Social Security, on a fixed income of between \$649 to \$1100 per month. It is the only retirement income they have to pay their rent, buy food, pay their bills and fill their prescriptions.

So many of our seniors did not have the opportunity to save for retirement and are living their elder years in poverty. Nearly 20% of Black seniors (age 65 and older) and 19.0 percent of Latino seniors have incomes below the federal poverty line, compared to 9.4 percent for the senior population as a whole. After a lifetime of lower pay or long periods out of work, Blacks and Latinos receive 26 percent less in average annual benefits from Social Security than do most seniors because of lower lifetime earnings.

Most of our clients (over 30 percent of African Americans and 26 percent of Latinos), rely on Social Security for more than **90 percent of income in retirement**. As others have said, a large proportion of all of our seniors are in the same boat. Only about a third of our seniors receive income from pensions or retirement accounts, or from other family or household assets. This lack of pension and other assets to supplement Social Security also accounts for higher rates of elder poverty among our clients.

At our center we see every day that poverty leads to poor health. Our clients suffer from higher than average incidence of untreated diabetes, heart disease and hypertension and stroke. Even if our clients are on Medicare, sometimes they are not able to afford to pay for the prescription drugs they need.

When it comes to retirement readiness, a study found that only two in 10 African Americans believe that they are on track to meet their planning and savings goals for retirement, and nearly twice as many say they are way behind or haven't even started. I've worked in the non-profit sector for many years without an employer pension plan and fear that I may be in the same situation.

The Urban League hopes that you will support this bill. Although it may be too late for some of the clients we currently serve, it will provide an important cushion against poverty for those who come after. No-one should have to decide whether they will eat, pay the utility bill or skimp on a birthday present for their grandkids. HB 3436 would allow the state to develop a Plan to improve the retirement security of everyone in our state.