



Taking action for basic human needs.



Good morning Chair Barnhart and members of the committee. My name is Andy Smith and I am testifying today on HB 2456 as a Co-Chair of the Human Services Coalition of Oregon.

“HSCO” as we call ourselves, is a big tent, umbrella coalition 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, crime victims services, 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 our most vulnerable 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.

Why am I testifying today? There are two reasons.

First, I am here to sound the alarm with respect to the \$125 million human services budget hole which ALREADY exists in the Co-Chairs budget----if you don't reach a \$275 million tax expenditure target, this human services hole will likely grow to \$400 million.

Second, as human services advocates, we want to remind you that affects and impacts our country's Great Recession is not over in Oregon-----February 2013 unemployment in 14 out 36 counties in Oregon remains above 10%.

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 jobs, 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 mental health, their physical health and their ability to succeed in getting an education and in staying employed in the changing economy. Many of these families, these senior and these kids have not recovered.

While the economy may be getting better for some in Oregon, for our most vulnerable a return to a 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/food stamp programs to make their most basic food needs; at the end of 2012 that number still hovered at about 400,000.

Our decades of underinvestment in behavioral health leave us with these stark realities:

- only 35% of kids who need mental health services are receiving it
- only 45% of adults who need mental health services are receiving it
- for those with addictions, the percentage is even lower...it's 22%
- our gambling addictions programs serve only 2% (yes 2%) of the 80,000 problem gamblers in Oregon.

In 2008, about 18,000 families received TANF benefits; at the end of 2012 about 35,000 families needed this program. About 1/3 of these families are at high risk of involvement in the child welfare system.

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, 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. 80% of them don't succeed in school.

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 tough hand.

So in conclusion, What can you do?

Find a way to reach the \$275 million target-----don't make the already \$125 million hole in the human services budget any bigger.

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.”