Senate Committee on Health Care and Human Services
March 21, 2013
SB 450

Chair Monnes-Anderson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Wayne Ground, and I am an Eligibility worker with the Department of Human Services. I am here today to speak in favor of the "dash 3" amendments to SB 450.

Meaningful change is needed within DHS, but for too many years, we've seen an unending string of piece-meal, stop gap measures, each claiming to revolutionize the work. The reality is that few of these changes have actually resulted in improvements for clients, or for workers for that matter. New data systems don't speak to old systems and even attempts to reduce paperwork have only created more work in some cases. To be perfectly honest, many changes at DHS have felt top-down and workers are tried and wary of the next "latest and greatest thing."

Taking a slower approach and a longer-term look at needed changes is the right step. Including front-line workers in the process is equally needed. It's one thing for management to talk about better serving clients, but often they are removed from the daily work of all the steps involved in a particular role in a particular program.

I'd like to take a moment, if I may, to give you one example among many that came to mind when I was asked to come here today to speak, how changes made with the best intentions by our Central Office impact staff in the field. I'll qualify this by saying that from a client's perspective, this is, or is supposed to be, an invisible improvement, however, from the Agency's perspective, the additional complications are confusing and counterproductive – I recognize that this is a preparatory move in the direction of going as paperless as possible, however, it was too perfect an example not to share with you today.

Some time ago, the Agency started generating redetermination applications to Self-Sufficiency Program SNAP program recipients in a batch process, 45 days prior to the end of their certification period. Along with these applications, the client was sent an envelope to return it, not to their local branch office, but to a central unit in Salem that would then scan the document into our Electronic Document Management System and destroy the original.

Each day, our team then checks the queue of scanned applications from the day before. There is no way of us updating which applications we've addressed, so we keep a separate log on the local branch server. We have one, or some days several, workers tasked with cold-calling these applicants. If we don't reach them, we then print the cover page of the application and forward that to our scheduler. If we do reach them, many workers then actually print the application to go through it over the phone with them. If the case must be pended due to lack of information, we print the application at that point, along with a copy of the notice (usually this is sent entirely electronically, and the hard copy at our end is simply so that someone looking at it knows what's going on). The pended application sits in a centralized filing system until the time either runs out, or the applicant returns what we've asked for, which is then worked by the Worker of the Day (usually, not the same worker that initially did the phone intake). We then give the completed application back to the worker that conducted the intake, where it sits in the file until someone needs to see it, or until the file has been open for several years, in which case the support team goes through it, destroys what they can, and then sends the rest to be electronically archived.

To recap this process, then, the Agency mails an application out. When it's returned, it's scanned electronically as an image file and the original is destroyed. We at some point then print that image, while it's being used, keeping a hard-copy that will almost never be looked at except by a reviewer or investigator, for several years. Finally, the hard-copy is then again archived electronically. We've gone

from application to image, back to application, and back to image again, with additional documents generated along the way that follow the same process.

I am happy to see workers included in this bill and in the broader conversation about how we can improve the workflow and services for clients over the long run. Thank you.