



DISABILITY BENEFITS TRAINING & CONSULTING, LLC

A.S.S.I.S.T. Assertive SSI Service Team

February 27, 2013

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HB 2712

Honorable Chair and Members of the Human Services and Housing Committee:

It is with deep urgency and sincerity that I request your help in shepherding this bill forth to the full legislative body for passage.

I am an advocate for people with disabilities. I have a unique niché in the private sector. I own and manage two small businesses located in Portland but I provide my services throughout Oregon and the greater Northwest. With one hat, I've officially assisted people for many years through the complex Social Security Disability application process. I work my cases from start to finish as a non-attorney representative. I help people correctly start their disability applications like the case managers used to do when General Assistance was in place. When I wear my other hat, I am traveling to different cities providing seminars to state and county agencies, non-profit service providers, housing advocates and authorities, homeless shelter workers, case managers, attorneys and families of the disabled. My mission is to try to help people understand and effectively navigate this mysterious, burdensome and lengthy federal bureaucracy.

I have seen, first hand, the devastating effects that Oregonians with disabilities suffer when they can no longer support themselves because of their severe conditions. I have seen the tremendous burden of waiting years to receive help they so desperately need. Oregonians do not ask to become sick and disabled. They do not ask for the impossible task of trying to live on next to nothing or even **zero** income for years.

I took a personal survey before today's meeting of this committee members' districts and I have served people with severe disabilities in each of them. So many of my clients could have benefited greatly with the help that temporary state disability benefits would have given them.

It is no secret that the costs of this situation are borne by many agencies such as Oregon Housing Authority, Dept. of Human Services, Dept. of Corrections, Oregon Dept. of Veterans Affairs and others.

I also want to let you know that when General Assistance was de-funded, the private sector did not and is not filling this gap in our social safety net. I feel like my efforts are

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just drops in the bucket. There are thousands of Oregonians who need this help. General Assistance as a statewide, public program is the missing component that addresses it.

Those who are destitute, stricken with injury or disease and the downtrodden from mental illness, so often, do not have a voice with which to speak to you as I do. I am truly honored, but for a moment today, to be their voice and ask for your help.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Most sincerely,

Mellani Calvin
Owner/Director of A.S.S.I.S.T.