



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

February 24, 2013
House Human Services and Housing Committee Hearing
HB 2712 General Assistance

Members of the Committee, my name is Jessica Larson and I am a housing advocate at Northwest Pilot Project where I work with older adults throughout Multnomah County who are disabled and at risk of homelessness. We believe in supporting and protecting people with disabilities so they can continue living in their homes as connected members of our communities. We know that our communities are stronger when our elders and most vulnerable citizens have the security they need and the resources they need.

Our agency works with many Oregonians who become disabled and are worried about how they will afford to get by. With Social Security disability benefits, an Oregonian with a disability is able to keep up with rent to his landlord. He's able to buy a bus pass and get to the local store for groceries or his pharmacy for medication. He's able to keep his medical appointments and the important relationships he's made with his medical providers. With his monthly disability check, he can pay his phone bill and keep in touch with his granddaughter or keep up with his local volunteer commitment. And through the disability benefit program, he is connected to a case manager who ensures his medical insurance and other benefits stay current so that his health and well-being stabilizes.

Disability benefit programs are a crucial lifeline for Oregonians with disabilities and they keep our Oregon communities vibrant and thriving. But so many Oregonians can't get timely access to their disability benefits. Unable to work, out of savings, and waiting for her SSI benefit, a woman with disabilities will likely lose her home, her belongings, and possibly her connection to her community. She'll risk homelessness and her health will decline. She'll face desperate decisions and certainly despair.

But we have a solution at our fingertips. We can temporarily provide disability benefits to Oregonians while they wait for their federal benefits. And we get reimbursed! We can ensure that our most vulnerable citizens have the means to pay their rent, get the medical care they need and prevent undue harm or crisis in their lives. With the federal reimbursement we can bring more money into our local Oregon economies while reducing reliance on our overextended and expensive emergency service systems. This proven and efficient program is a smart investment for Oregon.

With a temporary disability benefit program for Oregonians we can ensure that our neighbors and family members are safely cared for and our communities are strengthened. When we restore funding for this General Assistance program, we make Oregon a good and safe place for everyone to grow older.

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