

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Serving together in faith

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March 13, 2013

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House Committee on Human Services and Housing

Re: HB 2477 and HB 2850

Dear Chair Tomei, Vice-Chair Gomberg, Vice-Chair Olson, and Members of the Committee:

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of religious denominations, congregations and community-based cooperative ministries representing hundreds of thousands of Oregonians in every rural and urban community throughout the state of Oregon. Our organization urges your support of HB 2477 and HB 2850 as we believe that the state Earned Income Tax Credit is morally justifiable public policy that positively impacts all Oregonians.

Many of the members of the faith communities we represent and the people served through our social ministry network continue to struggle on the economic margins. As we all know, too many hard working Oregonians are simply not able to make ends meet. For example, an increasingly number of the thousands of people we serve monthly at our Northeast Emergency Food Program located at Luther Memorial Church in the Cully Neighborhood in northeast Portland are working—often times holding down more than one job. Due to wage stagnation and increases in costs for housing, food, transportation and education, there is not enough money in many of these household to pay all the family operating expenses so they turn to us for assistance.

Thankfully, in addition to the food and other assistance we are able to provide, we are also able to make sure that the people we serve know about the state Earned Income Tax Credit and other community benefits necessary to help them at times

of need. Thanks to the state EITC, more earned income is returned to these working family members allowing them not only to personally benefit, but to support the economy at large thanks to the multiplier effect that these dollars have. As such, the state EITC must be seen as a very important social benefit that warrants our support for as the Christian Scriptures remind us, “When one person suffers; all suffer...yet if one person is honored, all rejoice together” (paraphrase I Corinthians 12:26). The EITC is morally brilliant in that it allows us to collectively alleviate suffering and join together in improving the lives and futures of our neighbors in need—an honorable and joyful task that is worthy of your support.

We close our testimony with the story of a colleague at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Several years ago, Howard and his wife were unemployed due to the economic recession. Both have college degrees—in fact he has a Ph.D. At the time, they had children living at home and the economic stress was frightening. Finally, they were able to find part-time jobs but they were still struggling to make ends meet. Thankfully as he said to me recently, discovering that they were eligible for the Federal and state EITC was “a blessing...living on the edge as we were.” The state EITC helped to return more money to this family and helped them weather the financial storms they were facing. Today, Howard Kenyon is the director of our Northeast Emergency Food Program helping others weather the financial storms they find in their lives.

EMO urges your support of the continuation and expansion of the state Earned Income Tax Credit. Your vote in support of HB 2477 and HB 2850 is good public policy that promotes prosperity of the pocketbook and the spirit.

Respectfully,

David Leslie, Executive Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
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