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To: Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the House Human Services & Housing Committee

From: Carla C. Piluso, State Representative, House District 50

RE: House Bill 2029

Good afternoon, Chair Keny-Guyer, and my colleagues on the Human Services and Housing Committee, for the record, my name is Carla C. Piluso, I am the Representative from House District 50, the great city of Gresham and part of SE Portland.

I am here to talk about the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF), and the need for us to broaden the scope of those who are served by this program by resetting the qualifying income limit to a level that makes sense for 2015.

TANF gives struggling parents important tools to support their families and provide for the health and safety of their children. These tools include financial assistance which helps provide for basic needs like shelter, food, and hygiene items. Additionally, TANF offers programs to help parents find and maintain employment in order to work towards self-sufficiency. Families accessing TANF are provided with case management, childcare subsidies, and support accessing community resources. TANF clients also receive assistance accessing other appropriate services, and applying for Supplementary Security Income, or for grant money to help flee from domestic violence. Currently, 34,000 families and more than 60,000 children get support through the TANF program in Oregon. TANF serves an important purpose, to provide short terms assistance for families who are struggling, and lift them out of poverty.

This is an important program, and tragically, the income limit to access this program has not been changed since 1991, when the qualifying income limit represented 66% of the federal poverty line, an amount that today, equates to just 37% of the federal poverty line. This means that single parent families of three must earn less than \$616 per month to qualify for this program.

We know that \$616 is not enough to provide or sustain much of anything and does not allow a parent to provide adequately, for the health and safety of their children. We require families to reach the bottom rungs of poverty before they are able to access this much needed assistance. At this point, they are likely jobless, risking homelessness and forced to make impossible decisions, like whether to buy winter coats for their children or pay their electric bill.

I know that Oregon can do better, and we have to do better, to support struggling families. What House Bill 2029 does, is reset the qualifying income limit to 66% of the Federal Poverty Line, or just over \$1100 for a single parent family of three. By resetting this limit we can better support struggling Oregon families and give them a real shot at escaping destitute poverty. When children and families are doing well, Oregon is better for it.

Children perform better in school, they are healthier, and they are less likely to be victims of crime or suspects of crime when they have stable housing and food in their bellies. Re-evaluating this income limit, broadening the people who are served by this program just makes sense and is the right thing to do.

Many of you know I worked in law enforcement for 30 years with the Gresham Police Department and was honored to serve as chief for my last 6 years. I balanced my police career working with non-profits that support the needs of families living in or on the brink of poverty. I serve as the Board Chair of Human Solutions, a non-profit that serves outer east Portland and east Multnomah County, I chair Multnomah County's Commission on Children, Families and Communities and regularly volunteer with Snow-Cap Community Charities, the food bank for east Multnomah County.

I have interacted with many families that benefit from the TANF program or could benefit from the program if it were available to them.

One particular family stands out. Christina, a single mom with three young children under the age of seven, living in a two bedroom subsidized apartment, relying on public transportation, working full time as a receptionist for a local non-profit, having been placed there and mentored there by the Steps for Success Program. Christina's mother provided the needed child care, while Christina worked.

It was the mid 90's, I was a police lieutenant at the time and a member of Multnomah County's Commission on Children, Families and Community. I was asked by the Commission staff if I would participate in the "Walk a Mile Program". I agreed to do so; not certain what I was committing to, but was certain I could walk a mile. In reality, the "Walk a Mile Program", was a challenge to live on the dollar amount of food stamps that would be allotted to me as a single parent, with one child. I would be paired with a family, living at the poverty line to assist me in managing my allotment.

That family was Christina's.

Christina took me under her wing, taught me how to coupon shop, explained that certain personal hygiene items were not covered by food stamps, talked about buying the 25 pound bag of rice because rice goes with anything. The same could be said for dried beans and add some water to 2% milk and it will go further. When I mentioned that my daughter's birthday was coming up, she advised that a birthday cake could not be purchased with food stamps.

Well it may come as no surprise, but I failed miserably on this quest. I lasted two weeks. The dinner and cake that I purchased for my daughter's birthday dinner alone absorbed a huge portion of my food stamp allotment. I still get teased about this adventure. This always gives me the opportunity to say, I did fail, and then noting that Christina has never had the option of failure.

And Christina never failed. I have stayed in contact with Christina and her family. She is now a mid-level manager at the same non-profit that gave her an employment opportunity almost 17 years ago. She lives in a home, her children are almost grown and are successful in school, and she has a good job.

Christina seized opportunities available to her while she was a part of the TANF program; housing, employment training, transportation, and food stamps. Her story is a prime example of a great use of State dollars, with an excellent return on the investment.

I truly believe that we could have a lot more stories like Christina's in Oregon, if TANF were able to serve more families.

Thank you Chair Keny-Guyer and fellow committee members, there are several folks in the room that can answer any specific questions you may have.

Carla C. Piluso
State Representative
House District 50