



and the Oregon Food Bank Network
Serving Oregon and
Clark County, WA

Testimony in support of House Bill 2194
House Human Services and Housing
Submitted by Phillip Kennedy-Wong, Policy Advocate
March 4, 2015

Mission:

*To eliminate
hunger and its
root causes. . .
because no
one should
be hungry.*

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The Oregon Food Bank Network supports House Bill 2194. For the past ten years, many vulnerable Oregonians have struggled with qualifying for federal disability benefits. Not because they didn't qualify but because they did not have the support of the state's General Assistance program to get through the arduous federal application process. In that time many vulnerable Oregonians with severe or permanent disabilities suffered unknown fates. Most likely, their situations worsened and for some death.

The General Assistance program provided an immediate stopgap for individuals stuck in the long wait with federal approval. The program gave our neighbors with severe or permanent disabilities a chance at life in the form of cash assistance for basic human needs like housing, food, medical care, and basic case management that connected individuals to other services. For many, it is a way to get out of homelessness. The federal approval process can take 6 months to 24 months, too long for an individual with severe or permanent disabilities and immediate needs.

For the last five plus years, Oregon Food Bank organized an effort to reinstate the General Assistance Program. We brought together many non-profit organizations and other advocates whose mission is to improve the quality of life for our vulnerable neighbors. They include Central City Concern, AARP, Community Action Partnership of Oregon, Disability Rights, Partners for Hunger Free Oregon, Oregon Law Center, Oregon Associations of Area Agencies on Aging and Disabilities, and several more.

The Oregon Legislature has an opportunity to do something that will have a life affirming impact for many vulnerable Oregonians. Please help our neighbors with severe or permanent disabilities live with the dignity of being able to meet their own basic needs. We encourage you to move forward with a pilot project, as outlined in House 2194 that will pave the way towards fully reinstating the General Assistance program.

Thank you for your consideration.

