



Testimony to House Human Services and Housing Committee on HB2194

Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the committee:

My name is Karen Nettler, I am a resident of Portland and the board chair of Oregon Center for Christian Voices (OCCV). We are a faith-based non-profit seeking to activate Christians on issue of economic and social justice. We believe we have a clear mandate from Scripture to advocate for those whose voices are not always heard, and who usually are not at the table when decisions about public policy are being made, decisions that can profoundly affect their well-being.

We believe Scripture is clear about God's intended role for government and it is to assure that the poor, the sick and the marginalized in our community are cared for and have access to the basic necessities of life. The prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures reserved their harshest words for governments who failed to carry out their ordained role of assuring that the poor and the sick are protected. We believe the success or failure of our systems of government can be judged by how well "the least of these" are doing. It's probably safe to say the population that would qualify for General Assistance under the pilot proposed by HB2194 is not doing all that well.

For these reasons OCCV supports HB2194, sees it as an important step towards restoring a General Assistance Program serving a portion of a most vulnerable and needy population in our community.

In addition to speaking on behalf of OCCV, I am advocating in support of HB2194 for personal reasons. I worked in what is now DHS for over 30 years, came to know this most needy population through my work. It was heartbreaking to see the program cut back over the years, and eventually abolished, because it was truly the last resort for those who were unable to work, had used up all their resources, had worn out their welcome with family and friends, and were on the verge of, or were already homeless. As a person of faith, and as one who has seen the desperation of those who potentially would qualify for the program established in HB2194, I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Finally, OCCV believes that when we care for the poor and marginalized, we are acting on behalf of all of us, helping to create a community where all have opportunity to flourish, as God intends. Whatever our faith tradition or none, we are one community, one people, and when one of is not well, none of us are well. HB2194 is a small but significant step toward restoring a measure of safety, financial security, and dignity to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.