

To: Chair Gelser and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

From: Liesl Wendt, Director - Multnomah County Department of Human Services

Date: April 16, 2015

RE: Measures of Economic and Social Success, SB 890

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Multnomah County Human Services Department supports forming a task force on measures of economic and social success, as proposed in SB 890.

Poverty in Multnomah County is a growing and serious problem. Communities of color, immigrants and refugees, children, single-parent households, and persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by poverty. Children in this community face increasing challenges, with 23% of the County's children under the age of 18 experiencing poverty.

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is an outdated measurement tool which fails to portray the full impact of poverty. The recent publication of the 2014 Poverty in Multnomah County report demonstrates the complexity of poverty in our region. The drivers of poverty reach far beyond a single number or income level. Poverty is influenced by larger economic trends including reduced avenues to family wage jobs and a lack of adequate employment opportunities; personal or economic crisis, such as a job loss or severe health problems; and societal and institutional barriers that prevent people from fully participating in society.

How we choose to measure poverty influences the decisions and strategies the public invests in. SB 890 will result in the development of a more relevant set of measures for poverty along with recommendations on how to use these measures to improve outcomes for current state practices and programs.

The State of Oregon will not be alone in this endeavor. Other jurisdictions such as Wisconsin and California have adopted the Self Sufficiency Standard. This standard includes additional factors, such as childcare and transportation expenses, and takes into account those who are not able to make ends meet without the assistance of SNAP, public housing and other assistance programs.

In Multnomah County, we recognize that the development of a stronger set of measures for the experience of poverty will lead to more informed policies and practices that will better serve our communities in need.

As Director for Multnomah County Department of Human Services, I support SB 890. Multnomah County stands ready to participate and assist with the task force on Measures of Economic and Social Success.