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Date: April 20th, 2015
To: Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the Committee
From: Carla C. Piluso, State Representative, House District 50
RE: House Bill 3535

Chair Keny-Guyer and Fellow Members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing, I would like to request your support for HB 3535. This bill relates to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which provides cash assistance and case management to low income families in Oregon. HB 3535 proposes a reinvestment of \$30 million in caseload savings to improve outcomes for children and families in the TANF program. The bill does not require new funding; a steady decline in the number of families participating in the TANF program is generating the caseload cost reductions that fund the bill. Colleagues, this a unique opportunity that we cannot let pass us by.

As Committee Members may recall, in February, we heard about two different bills related to changing and improving TANF programs. At the direction of Chair Keny-Guyer, I joined my fellow Co-Vice Chair, Representative Stark, to form a workgroup and, with input from the Department of Human Services as well as Advocates, to bring forward one bill as a Reinvestment Proposal for TANF. Ultimately, it became necessary to draft a new bill in order to fit in all of the pieces that the workgroup agreed to move forward, which is House Bill 3535.

DHS identified that public assistance caseloads are on the decline, and that this could provide the funds that would allow the state to improve the quality of the programs and delivery of services to families in the TANF program. Many often note that Oregon is recovering from the recession, and it is important to remember that while we are recovering, we are not out complete, and economic recovery is happening in an uneven way across the state, meaning there are many families still struggling a great deal. For example, in Gresham, the local family shelter has been at capacity for months. These families know well the need that still exists, and the importance of these TANF investments. Many families who use TANF struggle with low wages, the lack of available career advancements, or barriers due to low literacy, criminal history, mental health issues or lack of work experience.

The reinvestment proposals contained in HB 3535 work with all of that in mind, and honor TANF's dual purpose of protecting children and helping parents join the workforce, this bill is made up of both investments and policy changes.

The specific investments work to:

- Reduce the impact of the "benefits cliff" when TANF participants become employed
- Simplify eligibility requirements and expand services to increase family stability
- Improve services that can prevent families from entering TANF
- Building program capacity to provide the customized, strengths-based case management approach that TANF participants need to achieve and maintain family stability and employment.

The accompanying policy changes:

- Enable the implementation of the reinvestment proposals
- Refocus the program direction
- Increase the program's flexibility to target local needs and opportunities
- Address outdated statute language
- Extend the current suspensions of HB 2469 which were put in place after the recession to ensure families could continue to receive cash assistance during this particularly tough economic time

This is an important bill, and we have a lot of dedicated people who put a great deal of time and effort to bring an impressive product forward. This bill will have subsequent referrals today to ensure that the amendments capture all that we aim to accomplish and that all of the details are accurate. I urge your support in moving this bill onto that process, and recommending it for passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carla C. Piluso', written in a cursive style.

Carla C. Piluso
State Representative
House District 50