



Rep. Ayssa Keny-Guyer
Chair, Human Services and Housing Committee
900 Court St. NE, H-484
Salem OR 97301

February 2, 2016

By e-mail to: HHS.exhibits@state.or.us

Letter of Support for HB 4042: General Assistance Pilot Program

Dear Chairwoman Keny-Guyer:

Serving Oregon's most vulnerable and homeless, the OSIP and OSIPM eligible population, is simply the right and truly humane thing for the Oregon Department of Human Services to do. As a long-time advocate for the disabled I fully support the redeployment of existing and highly trained DHS staff and resources in this way. The ten years since General Assistance was funded has brought severe consequences upon our disabled and unemployable citizens. Almost all of them are trying to live with zero income and have generally lost every bit of stability they may have had since becoming disabled.

Currently there is far too little help for Oregonians experiencing severe medical or mental health conditions to get through the daunting federal disability application process. There are so many paperwork hoops right from the get-go. Disability attorneys do not provide thorough help with the beginning of the application as there is no monetary incentive to use their legal expertise to get involved early on. Consequently, many people who should be receiving benefits are not because they could not surmount the first paperwork hurdles while sick and homeless. The beginning of the application is the most crucial time for thorough help in order to keep an applicant from entering into the multi-year appeals process. The technical assistance that the DHS Presumptive Medicaid staff can provide is crucial to rapid approvals of benefits and keeping cases out of the massive national backlog of claims.

The Social Security Administration has made many strides over the last ten years in web-based technology allowing "lay" representatives like me and the DHS Presumptive Medicaid staff to expedite the application process from a laptop in any outreach location throughout the state. The aid to the disabled homeless with reimbursable rent assistance in HB 4042 is extremely innovative and is a critical missing piece in the federal, state and local fight to end homelessness.

Providing this kind of specific help to our destitute Oregonians will change, and save, lives. I urge you and the Human Services Committee to move this bill forward and fund this critical program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mellani Calvin".

Mellani Calvin
Executive Director
Non-Attorney Representative

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