



Rep. Alyssa Keny-Guyer
Chair, Human Services and Housing Committee
900 Curt Street, NE, H-484
Salem OR 97301

March 15, 2017

Via email to: hhs.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer:

In the continuum of the social determinants of health, the top two factors that are essential to good health is income and housing. Yet there are so few resources dedicated to helping disabled adults access badly needed income that helps stabilize lives.


As the Executive Director of the ASSIST Program I wish to whole-heartedly **advocate for passage of HB 2959** and the continued funding of the DHS Collaborative Disability Determination Unit's General Assistance Program.

These highly trained, highly specialized CDU teams provide direct help in the State's fight to end homelessness for the sickest, most disabled, and most vulnerable Oregonians. Research bears out that a high percentage of people experiencing homeless are unable to support themselves through work because of serious disabling conditions.

Please know that there are far, far too few federal disability application specialists in Oregon like the ASSIST Program and the DHS CDU teams. This is an underserved niche in the private, non-profit, and public sectors. These CDU teams know the Social Security Administration's strict disability criteria like the back of their hands and their very high success rates, at the earliest stage of the review process, are outstanding! They keep the majority of the disability benefits applicants' cases out of the national, multi-year appeals backlog. This expertise, coupled with direct housing placement assistance for people experiencing homelessness makes, for an extremely innovative and effective tool to help end homelessness among the disabled.

Within the first two months of the program implementation last summer we were able to make our first referral to the CDU team and we worked collaboratively with them for an early success. Our client was a 48-year-old Clackamas County woman and had been homeless for over a year. She has a lengthy list of diagnoses. She suffered from chronic and very painful pancreatitis, renal failure, significant depression and anxiety and chronic fatigue, all of which was complicated by a psychologically-based eating disorder. We were so happy to be able to refer her to the new State program that was dedicated to helping her end her homelessness.

People do not get better from serious, chronic illnesses while living on the streets. They most always get worse without help. The monetary and housing assistance that General Assistance provides is absolutely life-saving. Please pass HB 2959.

All my best,

Mellani Calvin, Executive Director,
Non-Attorney Representative