



Partners for a
Hunger-Free Oregon

Ending hunger before it begins.

To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing
From: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Affairs Director
Subject: Statement of support for HB 2959
Date: March 15, 2017

We are at our best when we stand with one another in challenging times. General Assistance (GA) is a crucial bridge between the time a major life disruption occurs and the time when a disability-based benefit is approved.

Oregonians with disabilities should have nutritious meals, safe housing, and adequate medical care. Yet it often takes between one to three years to receive federal disability benefits. This often pushes people with limited assets into homelessness, into situations of downward spiraling medical conditions, and in some cases, even death.

In 2016, Oregon took a positive step with a limited reinstatement of the General Assistance program that helps up to 200 Oregonians to receive assistance while applying for federal benefits. This provides individuals with stability and dignity. It makes sense:

- Oregon gets reimbursed for its costs. When Oregonians with disabilities are approved for federal SSI/SSDI benefits, the state gets reimbursed for most of the amount paid out for housing, utilities, and other basic needs provided by the state.
- General Assistance is a wise investment and a good deal. Individuals with disabilities who fall into homelessness often end up in emergency rooms or shelters, and the costs are high. Federal disability benefits help cover the cost of housing and other necessities and help local economies.

The legislature should choose to fully-reinstate GA so it can serve every Oregonian that needs it. Yet the Governor's budget takes a step in the wrong direction by eliminating funding. This is unacceptable.

Put simply, we cannot balance the budget on the backs of Oregonians who have experienced life-altering disabilities.

We urge the legislature to protect and strengthen General Assistance program.