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Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

SB 5526 – DHS/APD budget

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Co-Chairs, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 5026, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Aging and People with Disabilities (APD) budget.

The mission of the Oregon Law Center (OLC) is to “achieve justice for the low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services.” We have long supported the values of independence, dignity, and choice, helping elders and people with disabilities to live in the least restrictive environment.

OLC works with the Campaign for Oregon’s Seniors and People with Disabilities (COSPwD) and we support their testimony. We underscore and expand the support for the current service level (CSL) for all of DHS. We understand that revenue will need to be raised this session in order to balance the budget, which advocates believe is essential to ensure a successful session, but more importantly, stays true to the commitments made to low income and vulnerable Oregonians.

I want to single out two APD programs, because of the cuts proposed in the Governor’s Recommended Budget (GRB):

- **Oregon Project Independence (OPI)** was cut by 75%, and the pilot projects serving people with disabilities were eliminated in the GRB. My experience with OPI goes back to the days of its passage and funding in 1975. I ran the

Clackamas County contract from 1977-1980. OPI became a program of Clackamas County Social Services, where I was one of the founders, and then director for 22 years. I have first-hand knowledge and experience in working with this creative and cost efficient program. And I have long advocated for an “age neutral” approach to OPI. I would like to see OPI receive CSL funding for the basic OPI program, along with full funding for the pilot programs;

- **General Assistance (GA)** –For background consideration, GA, a program for the “poorest of the poor,” was defunded in 2005. Since that time, advocates have been working to restore the program. The 2016 legislative assembly unanimously approved HB 4042, a bill that provides assistance to a capped average caseload of 200 per month. In addition, we proposed serving the most vulnerable of those eligible – those who meet the GA criteria of very low/no income and severe disabling conditions - who are also homeless. In exchange for signing an interim service agreement (allowing the state to recoup expenses from any retroactive portion of the benefit), DHS offers housing, utility, and personal incidental funds to help ensure stability as DHS works with clients in securing federal Social Security disability benefits. Once secured, clients have a predictable monthly source of income. In addition to the easing of human suffering, General Assistance is a program that leads to cost avoidance in other systems, including homeless assistance, emergency department utilization, and public safety.

Thank you for your consideration. I greatly appreciate your leadership and commitment to creating the best and most inclusive budget possible for elders and people with disabilities.