



Committee Chair(s) and Committee Members-

My name is Kenneth Thrasher, a retired business person, a member of OBC's Poverty Task Force, and current or past board member of the Children's Institute, Oregon Mentors, College Possible, Friends of the Children, the Oregon Halfway House, and Albertina Kerr Centers. As a person who grew up in a low income family, started work at a very young age to meet my basic needs, and had a wonderful mentor in Bill Naito who encouraged me to get a college degree, I both understand Poverty and have committed a great portion of my personal efforts to improving the lives of children and families in poverty. I really appreciate Representative Reardon's efforts with respect to HB 2534 to create a Poverty to Opportunity Commission and Fund. It's time for Oregonians to address poverty in a coordinated manner, versus the silos of activities that, while great in their intent, don't always maximize the opportunity to reduce poverty in Oregon.

A person in poverty, if we don't break the cycle of poverty, will have up to 200 descendants over five generations. We can't afford the compound effect poverty has on our society. By enabling children and families to escape poverty there is a triple payback, increasing individual esteem and life outcomes that will break the cycle of multi-generational poverty, having a better prepared and productive workforce for tomorrow's jobs, and a reduction in State and local social costs. By coordinating our efforts Statewide we can achieve a significant return on investment.

The key, from my perspective, is to better understand local, regional, and state needs from the those being served, including sub-group needs, as one size does not fit all. Combining this with an inventory of resources available will allow us to determine the gaps in services, policy needs, and alternatives to bring required resources to play in filling these needs. HB 2534 lays the groundwork for doing this in a coordinated manner, with the right people and organizations at the table. It starts with listening to local community needs.

My experience with low income children and families at the Earl Boyles preschool and elementary school in Portland, at the Yoncalla preschool near Roseburg, with re-entry jobs and housing programs at the Oregon halfway house, now the Northwest Regional Re-entry Center, with mentoring and youth development practices through Friends of the Children, and leveling the playing field for low income urban and rural students in achieving a four year college education tell me coordinated efforts work. By surveying needs, improving family and community engagement, blending financial and service resources, developing strong state and local leadership, and having an accountability system works for these highly successful organizations. How we leverage these best practices and the other state initiatives around job training and employment opportunities, reduced sentencing and re-entry programs, health and mental health opportunities, early childhood strategies, and career and post secondary opportunities can best be done in a coordinated way.

The often negative perceptions of people in poverty are just that, 90% perception and maybe 10% fact. These children and families want to be successful, avoid the many penalties of being poor, want a good education, want to be healthy and free of stress, and want good jobs that lead to sustainable careers. We can help enable that in a coordinated way through HB 2534. Thank You