



**Testimony in support of HB 2534
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As part of my work staffing the OBC Poverty Task Force, I organized a Prosperity Design Lab in November 2014. The goal of the Design Lab was to bring together the best thinkers on poverty from the nation with creative Oregonians and people who have experienced poverty to generate breakthrough ideas. One of the ideas that emerged was addressing communities of concentrated poverty. Although one would think that addressing these communities would not be a breakthrough idea the reality is that taking on this issue is so difficult that it tends to recede behind valuable, but not sufficient efforts, to address individual needs for food, shelter, child care, jobs, and health care.

Systematically taking on the complexity of addressing the multiple dimensions of poverty, with a focus on community leadership, is rarely done yet research shows that if 30% of the people in a community are poor everyone in the community is impacted --- in terms of health and educational outcomes.

HB 2534 is designed to eliminate barriers to the work that is going on now in many places in Oregon to address communities of concentrated poverty. Success for these communities requires community led initiatives that are based on deep, lasting, efficient collaborations across systems and organizations. Many communities have valiantly stepped up to this challenge. But, unfortunately, they too often find that the state is a barrier not an enabler. Our research finds that from the perspective of local communities, state government, with all good intentions, is not flexible enough and coordinated enough to provide the kind of support that is necessary to reinforce and support local collaborations to addressing poverty on a community level.

HB 2534 proposes creating a Poverty to Opportunity Commission, led by the Governor, that brings together state agencies, local government, philanthropy, and community based organizations with a goal of coordinating their efforts, technical assistance, and investments so local communities do not have to navigate silos, duplications, multiple different reporting requirements, and exhaustive grant applications. It also sets up a small Opportunity Investment Fund that can provide the flexible funding necessary to support collaborative efforts and capacity building. The hope is that seed money from the state will attract funds from other sectors so that the funds can be invested in a coordinated way.

I have spent the last 30 years or so thinking about how to address poverty, best practices for human service programs, how to make government more outcome and customer focused, and the relationship of federal, state and local governments to community led initiatives. The challenges I have described are not unique to Oregon but Oregon can be a national leader in resolving them.

Too many of our rural communities and our communities of color are suffering from poverty. The state of Oregon has a huge opportunity to support these communities if it is willing to look closely at its practices that inhibit action and be creative in coordinating resources, support and

advocacy. I want to thank Rep. Reardon for sponsoring this legislation and urge you support HB 2534.