



**Shangri-La**  
Enriching Lives Together

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

RE: HB 5526, TANF Program

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner-Hayward and Rayfield and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kendra Morgan, and I serve as Shangri La's Director of Strategic Initiatives. Shangri La serves as the JOBS contractor for District 3, which includes Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties. Annually, we provide support for between 3,000 and 3,500 individuals through Life Skills Workshops, Job Development, and Work Experience and JOBS Plus (unpaid and paid employment experiences). Through our services, we have the amazing opportunity to see lives transformed. Work is sometimes a bad four letter word when people enter the program, but in just a short span of time, we see attitudes change, confidence build, and people begin to see work in a positive context.

While I am writing to you as a nonprofit leader, approximately 20 years ago, I was a young single mom receiving TANF benefits. I had come out of a childhood rife with abuse, gone through a divorce, and was lacking confidence and skills to be successful in the workplace. The trauma I experienced in my childhood left me with scars that wouldn't heal overnight, but part of the healing journey included my experience in a program very similar to the program Shangri La provides, which provides critical skill-building, but also a place where you can learn to believe in yourself and discover your passions and talents, and get a start in pursuing the career in your chosen field.

From my experience, these services are vital to help others with not too dissimilar stories of my own, find their way in life. The Life Skills training, helps people learn about time management at home. Consider growing up in a family experiencing generational poverty, with parents that may have never had steady employment during your foundational years. People growing up with this as their experience often lack basic skills to know how to pack lunches and backpacks the night before, plan back-up daycare, or other fundamental skills to be successful as a working parent. Other services teach people the basic skills need to operate a computer, write their own resume, and acquire the skills to successfully interview for jobs. The TANF Program is a basic safety-net service providing the financial support to families on a temporary basis, while they seek to get on their feet (or in some cases back on their feet), and attain skills necessary to transition to self-sufficiency.

When I "graduated" from the TANF Program I went through 20 years ago, I was able to find employment as an Office Manager in a real estate office. Later, I discovered my passion for nonprofit work and have spent the past 15 years serving through various management and executive leadership positions. During this time, I attended many training seminars to grow my skills and put myself through college. This increased my skills and credibility, and open doors of

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opportunity that wouldn't otherwise be available to me. I share this because I believe that education is essential for people to move out of poverty. Education could come through vocational education, two-year degree programs through community colleges, universities, and other less formal educational settings. While I understand that it is not viable for the state to support people pursuing their college education, I think providing information about available resources to pursue education and helping individuals map out a sustainable plan to pursue their education, if they so choose, should be part of the system.

I want to recommend that you support funding for Self Sufficiency Programs, including TANF, at the 2015-17 biennial levels, but would also encourage you to support initiatives to better inform TANF recipients on the available resources for pursuing various forms of education. Doing so will equip families to successfully transition to self-sufficiency, and further prevent their need to seek government assistance in the future.

Thank you for your leadership, please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions regarding my testimony, or if there are opportunities for committee work around issues related to the TANF Program.

Sincerely,

Kendra Morgan  
Director of Strategic Initiatives  
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