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January 29, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Reardon, Chair
House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee
900 Court St NE, H-473
Salem, OR, 97301

Dear Chair Reardon

I am writing on behalf of SE Works, Inc. to express our support for House Bill 4042, Prosperity-1000.

SE Works is a nonprofit, community-based development organization (CBDO) with our roots in SE Portland and East County since 1997. SE Works is an integral part of the State workforce system through its onsite One Stop known locally as WorkSource Portland Metro-SE (WSPM-SE). SE Works and WSPM-SE offers universal access to employment, vocational training, and support services for those seeking employment, education and career training.

In 2016-17, SE Works through our WSPM-SE Center assisted 6,676 individuals with 33,000 individual employment and training services, 2,271 attested to SNAP /TANF (34%) and 385 homeless. In the period July 2017-December 2017 we enrolled 3,627 of which 1,454 attested to SNAP and/or TANF (40%) and 276 homeless. Since emerging from the recession, Washington and Multnomah counties have produced over 125,000 jobs and unemployment has fallen to 3.7%. As you can see above in our data these on-average figures obscure the reality of increasing income disparity, growing low-income employment, and rising poverty caused by structural changes in the economy.

SE Works also has extensive experience helping those with a criminal justice background to secure work: of individuals enrolled in WSPMS-SE this year, 1,167 have self-attested to be ex-offenders, significantly more any other WorkSource/One Stop Center in the Portland metro area and 500 ex-offenders were served in our NewStart Reentry Center totaling 1,667 (25%).

HB 4042 offers an innovative approach to address poverty and build a scalable, sustainable model that supports individual and business prosperity across the State.

Washington and Multnomah counties are home to the highest concentrations of poverty in the State and more than 166,000 people in the region live in poverty. Forty percent of all Oregonians of color living in poverty live in the region. More than 30,000 regional residents are unemployed and thousands work full-time but can't make ends meet because of low-wages, insufficient skills and few prospects for career and wage advancement.



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At the same time, regional employers that offer high quality jobs in industries such as healthcare, construction, and manufacturing are facing a shortage of skilled workers. The net effect of this divide- unskilled regional residents struggling with insufficient, stagnating wages on the one hand, and employers grappling with a shortage of skilled workers to drive productivity and growth on the other – is a significant missed opportunity to strengthen our labor market and support our growing economy.

HB 4042 offers an opportunity to help bridge this divide and ensure all residents, and especially those living in areas of concentrated poverty, have an opportunity to fully participate in the region's economic success. HB 4042 offers a unique chance to foster a stronger and more equitable future for the region and the State, and we urge your support.

We know that you value equitable opportunities for the most vulnerable populations in our community.

Your consideration and support are much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Glenn Dahl
President
SE Works Board of Directors