



Testimony in Support of HB 4081
House Early Childhood and Family Supports Committee
February 8, 2018
Submitted By Phillip Kennedy-Wong

HB 4081 is a simple and long overdue action to restore the benefit of the cash grant and JOBS program. It's simple because HB 4081 does not interfere with the Joint Ways & Means Committee responsibility of balancing the budget during odd-numbered year sessions. And it's predicated on fairness: what's budgeted for TANF by the Joint Ways & Means Committee and legislatively adopted should stay in program. If there are caseload savings during the interim, those savings would go back into underfunded components of TANF; i.e. the cash grant levels and the JOBS program.

One in five Oregon children are food insecure. An estimated 552,000 Oregonians are food insecure.ⁱ That's enough to fill Autzen Stadium 10 times or Reser Stadium 12 times. What's even more remarkable is Oregon's current food insecurity rate of 14.6 percent is higher than the national rate and higher than its rate in 2003, when our state was declared the hungriest in nation. That's fifteen years of entrenched high hunger.

Now imagine a young family that's food insecure experiencing emotional duress and financial crisis seeking help through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families(TANF) program. They hope the program can help stabilize their situation, connecting them to services like SNAP and Medicaid; and cash assistance for housing, utilities, food, transportation and other basic necessities. TANF essentially provides young families temporary reprieve from emotional duress to allow them to focus on regaining their parental confidence and building personal skills towards job readiness.

Today, there are about 22,000 families, nearly 57,000 individuals, in the TANF programⁱⁱ. They come from all walks of life. Some are escaping domestic violence. Some have experienced adverse childhood events that have left a debilitating trauma and dysfunction into adulthood as parents and employees. Yet some are just unlucky with a health care crisis or job loss. But all deserve a TANF program that gives them a chance to get out of a difficult situation. For the last twenty years, the cash grant has stayed at the same rate with no adjustment for inflation, losing value every year and the ability to help meet basic needs. The monthly cash stipend for a single-mother with two children is just \$506/month. With Oregon's affordable housing crisis showing no signs of lessening nor a job market projecting higher earnings, these families are in a more daunting position in order to leave TANF successfully. An insufficient monthly cash grant and JOBS program only prolongs the time a family stays in crisis.

Legislative passage of HB 4081 will help reduce in the long-term food insecurity in Oregon and make a difference to the families in crisis on TANF. Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Feeding America: Map the Meal Gap

ⁱⁱ Oregon Dept. of Human Services: September 2017 TANF Flash Figures

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