

Statement of Support for HB 2139 (with -1Amdt.)/HB 3028
Dr. Howard N. Kenyon, Vice President, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Thank you for allowing me to explain why I fully support HB 2139 (with -1 Amdt.)HB3028. EITC has been a lifesaver for my family and me.

Please renew and raise the Earned Income Tax Credit. If you ask me how my family could have benefited from a higher level of help from EITC, there is no doubt. Those were lean, hard years from which we are still in the process of catching up.

To set the stage, I have a Ph.D. and had, until my early 50s, a successful career working with an NGO in China, supervising a team of more than 100 international and local personnel. In 2007, for health reasons, my wife and I returned to the U.S. and settled with our four teenagers in Portland, even buying a house.

Then just as the 2008 Great Recession hit, we had to resign our international position and start looking for work locally – work that was not to be had. Work of any kind. Tapping every resource we could, including all of our retirement investments and going far into debt, we came within four months of losing our house and moving out of the area to live with our parents just to survive. Moving in with my in-laws in our 50s and with 4 teenagers – I assure you that had never been on my bucket list.

Finally in mid-2010, my wife and I found part-time work. Our retired parents remained generous in their help. I became a client of the food pantry I managed. But with a combined income of \$42,000 per year, we were still losing ground.

Then a friend, a tax preparer, recommended EITC. And for that season in our lives, EITC became a lifeline that steadied our bank accounts and got us through.

Gradually our income rose. My wife went back school to earn her MSW from Portland State and went on to be a SUN site manager for IRCO working with low income students. I am now vice president of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and represent that organization on the Oregon Hunger Task Force, the Oregon Food Bank Advocacy Committee, and the local Emergency Food & Shelter Boards. Our kids have been graduating from college and becoming gainfully employed, actively serving those less privileged.

My wife and I are still in Oregon, happily paying it all back through taxes, non-profit engagement, and volunteer work, serving others whose lives have followed similar paths into those valleys where you don't know how you will ever get out no matter how hard you work. People who can, like us, make it because of EITC.

Sincerely,

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