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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony to the Senate Interim Committee On Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery “House Human Services Committee Overview”

December 9th, 2022

Delivered by Christopher McMorran, Chief of Staff to Representative Lisa Reynolds

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, members of the committee, thank you for having me today. For the record my name is Christopher McMorran and I serve as Chief of Staff to Representative Lisa Reynolds, who is the new Chair of the House Committee on Human Services.

Chair Gelser Blouin graciously invited Representative Reynolds to join you all today to share some of her priorities for House Human Services in the upcoming session. Unfortunately the Representative had to be up in Washington County today seeing patients in her pediatric clinic, and sends her apologies that she can't join you. Instead, you get me!

However, the fact that Rep Reynolds is in clinic today is actually quite appropriate, since her work as a pediatrician has defined her values and inspired her priorities in public office. Her top priority as Chair of the House Human Services committee is child poverty, and the committee will be putting much of its energy and focus into discussing its scope, impact, and possible solutions.

To be clear, there have been gains in the state and federal level in lowering child poverty. These days, 15%-18% of children in Oregon live in poverty. And this is defined as a family of four making less than \$28,000 per year. This amounts to over 134,000 kids, disproportionately children who are black, indigenous, and people of color. These kids are at higher risk of hunger, developmental delays, social-emotional learning deficits, child endangerment, and, yes, becoming adults in poverty.

The issue of child poverty is a fundamental one – so many of the problems we tackle in this legislature can be traced back to the core issue of poverty. Whether it be housing and homelessness, educational outcomes, addiction and recovery, economic opportunity, child welfare, or combatting crime and violence, all of these issues are exacerbated, and in many cases caused, by poverty. And we know that when a child grows up in poverty, they are far more likely than their peers to remain in poverty as an adult.

Rather than focusing all of our energy on these symptoms, the committee will place significant emphasis on addressing the root cause and creating upstream solutions.

Representative Reynold's goal is for Oregon to cut the number of children living in poverty by one half.



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Ending child poverty would give every Oregon child an equitable opportunity to succeed. Moreover, it will make significant inroads on solving so many of the other challenges our state is facing. It will benefit our economy, improve our education system, bolster our workforce, and make significant improvements in community safety and public health.

Obviously, reducing child poverty is a large and complicated issue. What can we actually do to make this happen? I just want to outline a few things that the Oregon Department of Human Services and advocates in this arena are looking at - again, more details will unfold throughout the 2023 session, and beyond.

- Increasing benefits in nutrition support through
 - expansion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]
 - Supporting Food banks
 - And a Return to universal Free school breakfast and lunch for all (like the federal government provided in the pandemic).
- Providing more direct money to families who are living in poverty
 - With a redesign in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] redesign. (This is a federal program, previously known as “welfare”.)
 - Increase the number of families who access tax credits by supporting tax return preparation or by allowing a different path to get these tax credits
 - Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) - federal and state components
 - Child Tax Credit (CTC) - federal program (with the potential to add in a state funded “Oregon Kids Credit”)
 - Looking at Basic income programs - there are several pilots in the state and the country that show very positive outcomes in health and education.
- This all interwoven with work in education and housing and childcare.

So please stay tuned – we look forward to working with you all in the Senate to support Oregon’s children and make Oregon the best place in the country to raise a child.