

Dear Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee:

I would like to address three problems:

1. Because of my background as a nurse practitioner who worked in community clinics for low income persons, I am aware that our rural community has high percentage of obesity and diabetes in all ages. We also have few areas to do recreation that are available for low income persons in our community. Because of limited pools in our area, each year, we see several persons drown each year in our rivers from persons trying to use rivers to swim in. Although we need a swimming pool in our community, I favor a model which can definitely become an indoor facility that all ages could use year around for exercise to improve our community's health status. Our community has been told that to do this, we would have to have to do this in stages, if at all. This is because we have been told an indoor facility would be too expensive to build and to operate, even though that has been the wish of the community on several outreach surveys in the past. Our community is the poorest community in all of Oregon. I think our recreational development program should be helped to consolidate several needs we have in the community, so the facility for the swimming pool/gym could be rented by other community groups that also have space and recreational needs, so we could afford and have an indoor larger facility. For example, the Boys and Girls club has needs for a new, larger facility, now that the ground they have been using for activities will become a new six grade school soon. The high school has said they need another gym. The local college does not have an activity center. The YMCA has been approached in the past, but we did not meet their requirements. As a taxpayer, I do not favor taxpayers having added debt though bonding. I do not favor our recreation taxation district doing other programs except recreation, unless it is to rent space to other groups to make enough money for recreational needs in our community.

2. There was a message on the media that said that Oregon was proposing paying 1,000 dollars to homeless persons. I would lie to encourage the state to not give 1,000 dollars to every homeless person. Persons at the legislative level need to understand that there is only a limited amount of money that can be taxed on Oregonians before they will leave the state. Many affluent persons of our community have moved to Idaho to reside due to Idaho's cheaper property taxes, and yet shop in Ontario. Oregon needs less taxes to be paid by those who are housed, not more. Although many who are homeless have mental and physical health disabilities, they need disability application help and disability though the federal SSI disability if disabled, not state payments. Federal SSI Disability need to be speeded up from application to disbursement. I know a mentally- ill man who does not have any income, who is waiting for SSI disability who is homeless.

If the state gives the homeless money directly, this takes away from the money some homeless need for mental health and substance abuse treatment. It also takes away money for low income housing. Most hotels and motels do not want to house the homeless because of the many problems these persons have, and many rentals need a hefty amount to pay the first month's and last month's rent plus a deposit, so giving the homeless person money directly does not guarantee that they will become housed. Giving anyone addicted money can cause the addicted persons to spend money on more addictive substances and can cause a person to die.

Legislators need to know that laws they have passed are increasing the number of homeless persons in Oregon. I know of persons coming from other states to Oregon to obtain Medicaid and the freedom to use drugs without penalties. Many of these persons have become homeless. Homeless persons in Idaho in adjacent counties are told to come to Oregon, because Oregon has better benefits.

3. Monies dispersed by the state for homelessness and addiction needs to be sent to just a very small amount of organizations that have a reliable record of using money responsibly and delivering results for the people the monies were meant to serve. Dispersing funds to many agencies just hires more employees, who are doing tasks already done by other agencies. This approach only hires persons, but does not deliver monies to those with the needs that the money is supposed to help. If money from the state gives money for hotels and motels or other funds for the homeless, they need to vet the organization that is being given the money to make sure that these organizations also have enough money or other ways to have wrap around services for mental health and addictive rehabilitation available for the persons who need housing, and have a guarantee of enough persons who will use their facilities. I have been told that HB 2089 that is supposed to help persons with addiction needs is being spent on "county parks, new court buildings, and animal shelters". If this is true, this is not the intent of the law passed by the voters. If the marijuana monies that is supposed to be used for drug rehabilitation is in excess, then the excess should be returned to the cities where marijuana sales are high. Ontario has one of the largest marijuana sales in the state. Ontario also has problems meeting the increased needs for roads and police that marijuana sales has brought to our city with most of the sales being made to Idaho citizens who do not pay for the extra services the city needs. We also have a huge drug abuse problem and many of our homeless are drug users and well as having mental illness problems. Help Ontario have an inpatient mental health facility or a housing unit with wrap around services for the mentally ill who may also have drug and alcohol problems. Just funding the I-5 corridor for homeless services leaves out Ontario and Malheur county, who also have a high population of homeless persons.

4. The regulations for homeless encampments are too expensive. Small cities can't pay for non-portable toilet facilities or showers. Small cities may be able to afford portable toilet and shower facilities for encampments of homeless persons. If the state's regulation were changed, this could allow more services for the homeless offered by small cities and poorer counties.

Sincerely,

Judith Kirby  
