

February 2, 2016

HB4042 Testimony of Karen Nettler to
House Human Services and Housing Committee

Madam Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the Committee,

My name is Karen Nettler, Board chair of Oregon Center for Christian Voices (OCCV). I am writing today on behalf of OCCV and our members in support of HB4042. We are speaking out because we believe we have a mandate from Scripture to advocate for those whose voices are not always heard, who are not at the table when decisions about public policy are being made that profoundly affect their well-being.

Every day in Portland I drive by the tattered shelters of people who are homeless. People are homeless for various reasons, but we know many of them are in that situation because they are unable to work, have not had the resources and assistance they need to successfully apply for disability payments, and who are therefore, literally, left out in the cold by the rest of the community which surrounds them.

Every two years, for the last several sessions, the legislature has had the opportunity to bring at least some of these people in from the cold. Those efforts have failed in past sessions, and therefore we as a society have failed to protect the most vulnerable among us. As people of faith, we believe the success or failure of our government policies can be judged by how well “the least of these” are doing. We further believe that when we care for the poor and marginalized, we are acting on behalf of all of us. We become a more healthy society when these most vulnerable citizens are not left to fend for themselves. So, for the sake of all of us, we are grateful that this committee is again considering legislation that will be a small but significant step forward in relieving the suffering of these most needy members of our community.

In addition to speaking out on behalf of OCCV, I am advocating in support of HB4042 for personal reasons. I worked in DHS for over thirty years, came to know this most needy population through my work. It was heartbreaking to see the General Assistance program being cut over several years and eventually abolished. It was truly the last resort for those unable to work, who were without other financial resources, had worn out their welcome with family and friends, and were on the verge of, or were already homeless. As a person of faith, and as one who has seen the desperation of those who potentially would qualify for the program established in HB4042, I respectfully urge you to support this legislation, and restore a measure of safety, financial security and dignity to some of the most vulnerable among us.

Respectfully,

Karen Nettler