

Susheela Jayapal



Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

February 8, 2022

Members of the House Committee on Human Service
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 4079

Chair Williams, Vice-Chair Ruiz, Vice-Chair Scharf, and members of the committee,

I am the Multnomah County Commissioner for District 2, representing North, Northeast, and parts of East Portland. I write in support of the Oregon Freedom Pilot Program created by HB 4079.

There is a growing body of national and international research that points to the provision of basic income, unconditional cash transfers, debt reduction, and asset building as particularly effective strategies in meeting the challenge of creating economic stability for our most vulnerable residents. These strategies get to the heart of the structural barriers that face people trying to escape poverty in a way that other services do not. Direct cash assistance, in particular, is a high-impact strategy for improving stability and security for low-income individuals and communities facing racial and other inequities. Multnomah County is itself piloting such a program with its Multnomah Mothers' Trust project, which will provide approximately 100 Black mothers with unrestricted income of \$500 a month, and engage them in building additional strategies, including debt reduction and homeownership programs.

One area in which basic income and similar strategies will be particularly valuable is that of domestic violence. I serve as Co-Chair of the Gateway Domestic Violence Center Advisory Council, which focuses on those who have experienced domestic violence and are seeking services to leave their abusers. It has been clear in this work that one of the main reasons survivors stay in abusive relationships or return to their abuser is because they cannot afford to leave. When survivors of any type of trauma have stable access to resources that help them build economic resiliency, they are more likely to move out of poverty and thereby become less vulnerable to violence or abuse.

I am especially happy to see the waivers and exemptions included within this pilot, which could substantially benefit Multnomah County's efforts around basic income/unconditional cash transfer. By

Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

piloting this type of waiver to ensure that income/cash support does not cause participants to become ineligible for other benefits, you will help address a significant challenge to currently achieving the full benefit of these types of programs across the state.

If you were to strengthen this bill in any area, I would advocate that you add a focus on BIPOC populations, especially given the significant and disproportionate representation of children of color in the foster system and in those facing maternal and infant health inequities. I also would advocate that these funds come through the County, as DHS regularly partners with the County and community organizations to deliver pilot programs such as this (HSP). So it would benefit those seeking services for that to be the case with these dollars, especially as county and community programs have the ability to identify and engage diverse populations to participate in such an effort.

Thank you for your consideration.

