

Chair Nathanson, members of the committee, my name is Howard Kenyon. I am from Salem and am here in support of HB 2958.

My wife and I and our 4 children arrived in Oregon just in time for the Great Recession. After serving overseas in faith-based NGO work for many years, we bought a house in Portland in 2008.

Four months later, the economic crash hit and we were out of work. Two years later we finally found low-paying and part-time jobs. Gradually our pay increased and we crawled our way out ever so slowly.

Along the way we encountered remarkable generosity. One resource of great help was the Earned Income Tax Credit. I'd never heard of it until a friend explained how it is a refundable tax credit that helps low- and moderate-income working families by reducing their tax burden.

We certainly qualified - for 5 years, starting in 2010, when our combined income was \$20,000. I ran the Northeast Emergency Food Program. My wife taught pre-K kids until she went back to school to earn her MSW at Portland State.

Later, I testified at a similar legislative hearing that I, by then vice president with the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, was honored to speak in favor of the tax credit as it had benefited my family so much during our hard years. My objective, I said, was to help others as I had been helped.

I knew Senator Mark Hass, the committee chair, as my state senator. When I finished my testimony, he said the work we were doing and the children we had raised were all evidence the EITC had been put to much good use.

Our children are now thirty-somethings. Our oldest, who served in Afghanistan with the 10th Mountain Division, is still with the Washington National Guard. Our other son is a Catholic priest serving in the Lents neighborhood. Our oldest daughter is an ordained minister and campus pastor at Oregon State. And our youngest is a pre-K teacher at the international school we started in China.

Through those hard times, we managed to hang on to the house we bought in '08. A year ago, my wife and I sold it. We've semi-retired to more affordable housing in Salem. We're still involved with local nonprofits through part-time and volunteer work. We've more than paid back that tax credit and continue to give back to our community as much as we are able.

While at EMO, I served on and chaired the Oregon Hunger Task Force. While on the task force, I was honored to meet one of the chief sponsors of this bill, Representative Ricky Ruiz.

15 years ago, the EITC gave us much needed traction. I trust we've more than made up for your investment. Besides how it helps working class Oregonians, I love how EITC has always received bipartisan support – thank you Representative Smith! It is something we can – and should – all get behind and continue to expand.