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HB 2469: TANF Expansion and Improvement
House Committee on Human Services and Women's Wellness
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Chair Tomei and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance of HB 2469. My name is Cathy Kaufmann and I am the Policy Director for Children First for Oregon.

Children First is a widely respected nonprofit, nonpartisan child advocacy organization that has been speaking up on behalf of Oregon's children for 15 years. We believe every child in this state has a right to health, safety and security.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is a critical program for protecting children in Oregon. Its intent is to help the most vulnerable children and families through the most difficult of times. Children make up the majority of the TANF caseload – about three-quarters of Oregon's TANF recipients are children. As such, the well-being of children and the most current evidence base regarding child and family outcomes must be at the forefront of considerations when it comes to making changes to this program.

I believe that HB 2469 does just that: it recognizes the importance of child outcomes, makes changes based on current knowledge of best practices, and addresses the new federal requirements in a way that will help Oregon families succeed.

HB 2469 does the right thing by allowing children to continue receiving TANF benefits beyond the 60-month time limit for adults and requiring the state to more thoroughly evaluate families before sanctioning them. Children must never be the victim of punitive measures aimed at parents. Conducting more thorough evaluations to address barriers to full participation and thereby increasing the engagement of families in the process of transition off TANF will prove far more effective in producing positive outcomes.

HB 2469 recognizes that families with newborns face particular challenges in their transitions from welfare to work. Federal TANF law allows states to exempt parents with children under one year of age from TANF work participation activities. Several states have chosen this option. Oregon exempts new parents for only the first three months. HB 2469 gives parents of newborns an additional nine months exemption from work requirements, so that parents with new babies have one year to become stable and focused on raising a healthy child before going back to work. This is an important component of the bill, considering the stress of caring for a

newborn, particularly for single parent households. A further stressor is the fact that infant care is less available and more expensive than care for older children.

HB 2469 restores policy of allowing families to receive some child support while receiving TANF aid. Research suggests that more generous state distribution policies actually increases both the rates of child support collections and the amounts. When children receiving TANF never see the support paid by their parents, parents are less likely to pay it. Poor parents frequently walk away from regular jobs and child support payments because they know that the money will be kept by the state rather than going to their children. Current distribution rules weaken parents' willingness to work and pay support for children while they receive TANF assistance, and also decrease the chances that these parents will start paying after their children stop receiving assistance.

The children who need TANF assistance are among Oregon's most vulnerable residents. Extreme poverty has been shown to place children at risk for serious, life-long consequences. HB 2469 does an excellent job of considering the needs of these children while meeting the new federal requirements, and I urge you to support it. The long-term fiscal, social and moral costs of any bill that seeks to do less will prove devastating. Thank you for your time and consideration.