

## State camping bill considered a 'workable solution'

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE  
STAFF WRITER

A bill that would require the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to provide between five days and two weeks notice of a camp sweep on state-owned land passed the House Transportation and Economic Development Committee on Monday.

The Senate version of the bill, SB 447, also requires that the notice be printed in English and Spanish, say when the sweep will take place, and leave information, if belongings are removed, of where the belongings can be picked up, and when.

Marc Jolin, the executive director of the outreach agency JOIN, says that the bill will ensure that the belongings of homeless individuals who camp near the Eastbank Esplanade, under bridges, and underneath freeway overpasses won't be lost.

"(Right now) there is no specific notice," he says. "It's a win-win. It creates less conflict for ODOT, and improves the situation for everyone."

The Oregon Law Center, which provides legal services to low-income and homeless individuals, was a main pusher of the bill, as was Lane County Legal Aid and Advocacy Center.

"The underlying concept of the bill is that advance and effective notice of an impending camp clean-up will encourage homeless individuals to move their belongings themselves," said Sybil Hebb, a lawyer at the Oregon Law Center, at a February 28 hearing.

A 2010 bill would have fast-tracked camp sweeps without notifying homeless individuals who camped in those areas. The Oregon Law Center opposed the bill, and it did not become law.

The current bill originated not from homeless advocates, but out of environmental concerns. John Brown, a Eugene environmental advocate, worried that accumulated garbage along the banks of the Willamette River would enter and contaminate the river during floods, and thus impact the river's water quality.

"On many occasions, I have had a difficult time making sure the items found under overpasses (and) bridges do not get washed into the waterways during periods of peak high water," he said at the same hearing.

He says the bill gives a "workable solution."

The bill passed the Senate on April 7, so the bill's next stop is a vote on the House floor. If the House passes the bill, it moves to Governor John Kitzhaber's desk to sign into law.

## TANF proposals work through the Legislature

Advocates relieved time limit won't change, but worry about long-term effects of cutting support services

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE  
STAFF WRITER

Proposed changes to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program could salvage some provisions of the program after Gov. Kitzhaber proposed drastic cuts earlier this year.

The changes avoid shortening the time limit a family could receive TANF benefits to 18 months, down from the federally recommended 60 months. Relieved advocates of low-income families and individuals said such a drastically shortened time limit would cause hundreds of families to become homeless. The changes were announced during a hearing in the Legislature's House Human Services Committee on Wednesday, April 20.

"That's good news," said Marc Jolin, the executive director of the homeless outreach agency JOIN, who estimates that half of JOIN's clients receive TANF benefits.

But House Representative Tina Kotek (D-Portland), the principal author of House Bill 2049 and TANF's legislative champion, said it is still not clear whether the program's 60-month benefit limit will be preserved.

"This is the most modest package of statutory changes we can make," she said. "We may have to make more, particularly around time limits."

House Bill 2049 changes the TANF program in six ways:

- Modifies eligibility requirements to require applicants to participate in the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program while applying for benefits and develops an "effective" individualized case plan focused on job readiness training, education, community service, and other activities "that promote family stability and financial independence."

- Eliminates an enhanced benefit for people applying to receive Social Security Disability insurance.

- Eliminates a \$50 per month payment to families and individuals who left the TANF program as a result of finding work.

- Puts a cap on the Parents as Scholars program, which supports parents as they seek a two- or four-year degree. The program would not accept new enrollees. Current enrollees could finish. One percent of TANF recipients participate, and the program "is currently fully utilized," Kotek said. "There will be more budget savings if we eliminate the program entirely."

- Reduces supportive services to TANF recipients participating in the JOBS Program.

- Makes participation in the JOBS program voluntary for parents with children under the age of two. Currently,

participation is voluntary for parents with children aged six months or younger.

The changes would be in effect for the upcoming biennium, July 2011 to July 2013.

The House Human Services Committee did not discuss the changes, or suggest any further changes. That is extremely unusual for a policy committee, which typically hears public testimony, questions, and proposes changes to bills.

The public hearing for House Bill 2049 took place one day before bills had to pass out of legislative committees in order not to die.

Members of the Human Services Committee expressed frustration that they were unable to carefully look at the bill.

"These are fairly significant changes to these programs," Rep. Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland) said to Kotek. "Handing this to us today means that we are not going to have a policy debate in this committee. You are the champion of TANF. There is no question about that. But this is not a good way to handle what is going to be a very difficult decision. I wish we would have some real time to discuss it."

"The department had been asking for many weeks to get amendments to this committee," Kotek responded. "It was my reluctance to put forth an amendment not knowing what it would be (given the budget)."

The bill was passed onto the Joint Ways and Means Committee, where it will be considered in the Subcommittee on Human Services. Kotek co-chairs that subcommittee.

TANF is a program reserved for the poorest of Oregon's poor. It provides a cash benefit of up to \$508 a month for individuals or couples with dependent children, who stay on the program for an average of 24 months, to help cover their basic needs while they participate in job training programs, educational programs, and other programs to help them re-enter the work force and become self-sufficient.

TANF underwent significant changes in 2007 as a result of new federal requirements geared toward increasing TANF clients' participation in work programs.

"We were really trying to tailor it," Kotek

said, to create programs that took into account the various needs and barriers of TANF clients.

"The program redesign was working," Kotek said. "We saw new job placements."

One reason changes are necessary, she said, is that "the case load is off the charts."

The number of two-parent families in TANF increased by 330 percent since 2007. Overall demand increased by 57.3 percent.

Under Governor John Kitzhaber's proposed budget, \$67 million would be cut from TANF by reducing the amount of time someone could be on TANF, throughout their lifetime, from 60 to 18 months.

Oregon would have the lowest time limit in the nation. The cut would affect 7,000 Oregon families. "That is going to have a disastrous effect on Oregon families," said Jean DeMaster, the executive director of Human Solutions, which houses poor families.

The Subcommittee's co-chairs "are committed" to not cutting the time limit. "We all know that's a bad cut," Kotek said.

Kotek said the changes will mean TANF will no longer be tailored. She thinks that will directly effect how long people are on TANF, and their success. "We won't see the successes we were seeing before," she said.

She hopes that TANF will return to the 2007 design once the caseload decreases and the state's budget improves.

Kotek wants to take \$45 million from the state's Rainy Day Fund, \$10 million of which would go to the JOBS program, and \$35 million go to preserving the 60-month time limit. If money is not found, it's possible that \$65 million could be removed from the JOBS program, which Kotek said is "going to be very difficult to get that back" in future legislative sessions.

Advocates wait with bated breath and worry how TANF will change, and are united in their call that the time limit not be reduced.

"At the end of the day, the basic cash benefit allowing people to put a roof over their heads is the most important thing," Jolin said. "Absent the cash benefit, they will become homeless."

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