

January 14, 2005

EXHIBIT NO. 10

DATE: 1-14-05

BILL NO. SB 29

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Colette Gray and I am the Community Advocate from Opportunities Incorporated in Great Falls, which is HRDC 5.

I am here today to share with you what happens in my community when drug felons return to their families. Currently over 1000 people have been released to Cascade County. The convicted drug felon is not eligible for food stamps, so when they return to a household that is currently receiving food stamps the amount of food stamps does not increase even though the number of people being fed has increased. I know that when meals are prepared for a family the per person portion decreases and the children who need the nourishment to grow are the ones who usually suffer.

Currently in Montana more women are being arrested for drug related crimes than any other category. When those women have served their sentence and done their time, they are given back all of the other rights (such as the right to vote) except for Food Stamps, TANF and housing subsidies. These 3 supports for their families may be the difference between them prospering and becoming contributing members of our community and re-offending because they are struggling to survive.

The amount of emergency food we have referred clients for has continued to increase. In some cases, if the head of household is a convicted drug felon they do not complete the paperwork necessary to receive food stamps for the rest of their family.

In other states they have changed this law and access to Food Stamps has increased. As an agency helping people in emergency situations any safety nets that can be accessed by these families will increase their chances for self-reliance through community support.

Thank you for your time.

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