

Madam Chairman, members of the committee,

Good afternoon! My name is Christine Tiddens. As the Legislative Advocate (intern) for Catholic Charities of Idaho and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise, I bring you greetings from Bishop Michael Driscoll, faith leader of Catholics throughout Idaho and Ms. Rosio Gonzalez, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Idaho. We support the proposed rule change that removes the food stamp asset test.

Catholic Charities of Idaho represents the poor and vulnerable in the state and provides services to needy families. But our supportive services cannot keep up with the rising number of impoverished individuals. Many families have been negatively affected by the economic downturn. It is not surprising, then, that nearly one in five Idahoans live in a household that struggle to provide enough food for all members of the family.

Food stamps are a vital source of nutritious food; although the relief is temporary, it makes all the difference to a family with hungry children. Current eligibility requirements mandate that a family cannot have more than \$2,000 in assets to receive benefits. Assets can include savings accounts, vehicles, and retirement accounts. Thus, if a family owns a tractor, or an ATV for hunting, it will not qualify for the program. Needy families in Idaho with assets such as tractors and other equipment stand to benefit from removing the food stamp asset test. Tractors and other equipment are necessary for our frontier way of life, but if the asset test remains, our families struggling with hunger will not qualify for food stamps.

Governor Otter stated, "In all that the state government does, there are those things that are necessary and those things that are nice, and necessary must always take priority over the nice things." The Catholic Church believes that it is necessary to ensure that families in Idaho who are struggling with unemployment or underemployment receive adequate and nutritional food. We believe that access to nutritious food is a fundamental human right.

Families will pull themselves up after this economic downturn. But it will be harder for families to recover if we make them choose between assets and food. Catholic Charities of Idaho and the Catholic Diocese of Boise urge you to accept this temporary rule change and remove the food stamp asset test.

Bishop Driscoll and Ms. Gonzalez thank you for your leadership in the legislature. We urge you to remain mindful of the well-being of children in the state and their families, particularly those most vulnerable and fragile due to poverty, as you decide upon legislative proposals.

Madam Chair, I stand for questions.