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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Evidence-Based Policymaking for Social Welfare Programs**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

I would like to start off by noting that – if my research is correct – this is the first ever hearing this committee has held on this topic.

This is a great opportunity to dig into an issue that really should be an underpinning of the work Congress does every day: that is to say, we should be constantly asking whether the laws we write are working as they ought to be.

And to add another layer on that: Does the way the federal government funds our programs obstruct or facilitate improvement.

Right here in this committee there are shining examples on both ends of the spectrum.

The home visiting grants fund a variety of models to help parents of young children essentially improve their parenting skills. More resources are available for programs that can demonstrate the best results, with help along the way for newer, promising programs to build up their evidence-base.

The home visiting models have had huge success – leading to healthier births, reduced child maltreatment, reduced criminal justice system involvement, and higher employment rates for the parents themselves.

On the other end of the spectrum is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

There are real questions about whether the way success is measured in the TANF program is leading to success for the families it is meant to help.

Instead of rewarding states for helping families find work or reduce poverty, TANF rewards states for simply reducing the number of families they serve regardless of the need.

And while a small amount of TANF dollars are reserved for welfare research, there's no built-in feedback loop to ensure what's being paid for is actually what works. Congress ought to be finding ways to build in that type of continuous program improvement.

Now, there are certainly limitations to this approach of funding what works and not funding what doesn't.

To start, researching and evaluating programs can be expensive; and in some programs it would be unethical to have a control group that is actively denied services. For example, it would be wrong to deny a child access to foster care when she is being abused and neglected just for the sake of scientifically evaluating the effects of foster care against a control group.

Additionally, bringing evidence-based programs to bigger scale can also be expensive – they often rely on a highly educated and trained workforce. So progress may be slow.

Finally, reasonable people can disagree on what it really means for a program to be “successful.” For example, there’s no question the SNAP program has had success in reducing hunger and food insecurity for many families across the nation but others may place less value on those outcomes.

I know that witnesses today will speak to new approaches to testing out and paying for innovation – especially Social Impact Financing or Pay for Success.

My home state of Oregon, like many states, is exploring the feasibility of Social Impact Financing. And like many states, Oregon is witnessing firsthand the challenges with deciding whether taxpayer dollars should be used for this type of financing.

I look forward to the discussion around the strengths and limitations of that model.

I commend the Chairman and our colleague Senator Bennet for bringing the conversation around these innovative partnerships to the Senate and to this Committee with their Social Impact Partnership Act.

To our esteemed witnesses – you’ve got a lot of ground to cover today. This topic is anything but narrow so I commend you in advance for the breadth of expertise you bring to the conversation and look forward to hearing from you this morning.

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