



Testimony to Congress: Heather Reynolds

July 9, 2014

Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Van Hollen, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Heather Reynolds and I am the President/CEO of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Fort Worth. It is my honor to be able to share my thoughts on poverty reform in the United States.

Let me get right to my main point. Poverty is complex and often cyclical. Poor parents have poor children and poor children become poor parents. The cycle continues until it is broken. **Case management is the critical element in moving someone from government dependency to self-sufficiency.** That is why we believe that case management has to be an integral part of the conversation on how we reform our approach to poverty.

First, case management allows us to work with clients in an individualized way. What we see every day in Fort Worth, Texas is over 300 people calling or coming to our organization for help. The people we serve are all in poverty-whether it be in the form of income poverty or asset poverty. Each individual's poverty looks different but we typically see three main types of poverty. The first type is chronic poverty which results from a combination of factors, such as age, mental

illness, or a significant disability. People in chronic poverty are people that are often going to need safety net services throughout their lives. The second type is situational poverty. There are a number of reasons for this condition to emerge, but some of the most common are divorce, death, unexpected health expenses, and the loss of a job. These incidents can cause a spiral of events which leads to a loss of income and material possessions. This type of poverty is most often temporary and short; direct intervention can quickly put a family back on track. The third type is generational poverty. People in generational poverty are those who have two or more generations living in poverty. It is passed down from parent to child. It is a mindset of living in the moment - being proactive, setting goals and planning ahead are not a part of the generational poverty mindset. Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief systems. Understanding the type of poverty a family is in is critical to understanding how to combat it. Case management is most needed for those in situational poverty and generational poverty. And, those in generational poverty need a deeper level of case management because it requires a mindset change. Understanding a client's experience of poverty allows us to serve them in an individualized way.

Second, case management allows us to serve in a way that is holistic. In most cases, people who come to Catholic Charities Fort Worth face complex, multifaceted and interrelated challenges. The way the federal system is designed, clients receive services for each of their needs independently from other problems they may be facing. While addressing these

issues individually as they occur can provide much needed relief to the client, there can be some doubt as to the effectiveness of providing services on a single-issue, short-term basis in creating sustainable self-sufficiency. Case management helps transform interventions from being a disarray of solutions to a coordinated plan to get individuals and families to their best possible outcomes. Good case managers help clients manage the situation; they do not “manage” the client. Effective case management is a participative process in which the client and case manager work to holistically move a family forward for long-term success.

Third, case management gets results. For example, the federal program, the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program for refugees, which we run at Catholic Charities Fort Worth, is seen as one of the most successfully federal funded anti-poverty programs in the United States. In Fort Worth, our success rate of moving folks from poverty to self-sufficiency is high because of the intensive case management that is paired with ancillary services. In 2013, 90% of our clients in this program became self-sufficient within 6 months.

From my experience, many federal programs are not designed and measured for the end goal impact. How can we set our goal at ending homelessness and then measure success by counting the number of shelter beds we fill? How can we have a goal of a family thriving and then count it successful when they are signed up for public benefits? That is why it is my firm belief that research and a focus on results has to be paired with the services provided. At Catholic Charities Fort Worth, our main

partner in this endeavor is The University of Notre Dame's Lab for Economic Opportunities. Through rigorous impact evaluations, this lab aims to identify the innovative, effective and scalable programs that help people move out of poverty. One of our pilots being evaluated, Stay the Course, is aimed at increasing persistence and degree-attainment among low-income students by reducing the chance that events outside of school derail a college education. This is achieved through two distinct mechanisms: holistic, personalized case management and emergency financial assistance. The pilot is tracking academic and employment outcomes for randomly-selected students receiving support services and for a control group of students. By comparing outcomes for these groups, the evaluation quantifies the impact of these services on academic performance, educational attainment, employment, and earnings. In the year one results, students receiving services from Catholic Charities averaged more credit hours in one year than the treatment group. But, what is most impressive is that more students persisted in their education when a part of Catholic Charities services. Case management was the difference. Case management is the answer to reducing poverty in America. It supports the individual's needs and unique situation. It allows us to address a family holistically and make services more efficient and effective. Case management gets results.

Poor parents have poor kids and more often than not, poor kids become poor parents. The cycle continues unless it is truly and purposefully broken. Case management is the critical item to moving a family out of poverty and keeping them out.

Thank you for your time today and thank you for what you do for people in need throughout our great country.