

**Opening Statement
Chairman Mark Souder**

“Faith-based Perspectives on the Provision of Community Services”

**Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy
and Human Resources**

Committee on Government Reform

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Good morning, and thank you all for joining us today as we continue our discussion of the role of faith-based organizations in the provision of social services. We are privileged to be conducting this hearing at the Emerald City Outreach Ministry facility.

Many faith-based and community organizations across our nation understand that they have a duty to help those who are less fortunate than they are. We are a nation richly blessed, not only with government resources, but also with caring individuals who dedicate their lives to helping others. Through charitable choice and the faith-based initiative, the government has recognized the tremendous resource it has in its faith community, and in neighborhood-based organizations. These groups have the ability to reach out to men and women that the government may never know exist.

If, in the United States, we had an unlimited amount of money, we'd be able to fund every organization that is effectively providing social services. The hard reality is that we don't have unlimited resources. So we have to find a way to get the dollars we do have into the hands of the most effective agencies in the neighborhood. The faith-based initiative is designed to bring neutrality to the government grant system so that smaller community and faith-based organizations can expand their capacity to help people in their communities that might otherwise be overlooked.

Neutrality towards all applicants, requires that government partner not only with secular organizations, in effect recognizing a state-sponsored secularism, but it demands that government look at the merits of each program—is the program helping substance abusers kick addiction? Is it helping a homeless woman find a home and a job? Is the program making a difference in the life of a child who has lost a parent to prison?

Catholic Charities is an organization that for decades has been held up as an example—even by critics of the faith-based initiative-- of how government partnerships with faith-based organizations are working, because they held the service arm of the organization under a separate incorporated organization. Now the California Supreme Court has said that because Catholic Charities offers secular services to clients, the majority of whom are not Catholic, and does not

directly preach Catholic values. The Court ruled that it is not a religious organization and therefore must provide services contrary to Catholic teachings.

A representative of Catholic Charities of California had planned to be with us this morning, but had an unavoidable conflict arise that prevented his appearance. They will be submitting testimony for our record, and the Subcommittee will continue to focus on the ability of faith-based organizations to provide services and partner with government—if they so choose—while not being required to redefine their mission in order to form those partnerships.

We've been having this discussion in Washington for quite some time. What I find to be the most frustrating is the tendency to lose sight of the reason we are having the discussion in the first place. We know that faith-based organizations are effectively transforming lives and communities. Where the discussion gets bogged down is in the legal questions. We need to refocus the discussion on what makes a faith-based organization successful. What is it that makes them effective? The fact that faith-based organizations are effective is the reason this discussion began in the first place. It is time to listen to the providers tell us how we can best assist them in their work. I doubt think that government strings and bureaucratic red tape are something that you actively seek! I believe that one of the best ways we as legislators can help is not by giving you more government strings to deal with, but by helping to facilitate new relationships

among the providers of social services and the foundations that provide financial and technical assistance to faith-based and community organizations.

The Administration has established offices for Faith-based and Community Initiatives in seven Executive Branch Departments. These offices have been charged with identifying the barriers to the participation of faith-based organizations in providing social services. In addition, these agencies have been working to reach out to faith-based and community organizations that have not previously partnered with the government. Some progress has been made, but I believe that we have a long way yet to go before we see a truly level playing field. Government has a very high duty to provide the most effective services available in the most efficient manner possible. We need to constantly be looking for the programs that are helping to improve lives and communities and help those organizations expand their capacity.

At the end of the day, we as legislators need to know that we are using all available resources to help improve the lives of the men, women and children who need help. We need the faith-based community as partners. Today we have the great opportunity to talk with providers of a range of faith-based services who have been working diligently to produce positive change in the Seattle community. We

need to understand how the unique element of faith impacts the structure and success of these programs.

In Seattle you have developed a strong network of organizations that have not only a strong faith but a strong heart for helping people in need. Our witnesses today are just a small fraction of the many programs that are meeting the needs of the greater Seattle area. I am anxious to learn about your work, your history and where you believe your community is headed. I look forward to your testimony.