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. I left behind some frigid weather in my hometown of Fort Wayne, Indiana, so I am especially glad to be here in Los Angeles.

Many people across this county have a specific image of Los Angeles—that of glitz and glamour and movie stars. The image that comes to mind is not that of the less fortunate. But, Los Angeles, as in every other city, has many individuals who are not living a fast and privileged life. I'm certain that our witnesses today will help us see the true picture of Los Angeles—where the needs are, as well as which organizations and individuals are working to meet those needs.

Scores of dedicated men and women open their hearts and homes to the less fortunate each and every day. They do this not for the glory of

public recognition, or for the money, but for the simple fact that their faith calls them—demands of them—to action. They are committed to improving the lives of their neighbor, no matter the sacrifice to their own safety and comfort. Often their only reward, which they will tell you is the best reward, is the knowledge that they have restored hope to someone who had been suffering. The men and women who run the countless faith-based social service organizations in neighborhoods all across the county are often the only people willing to tackle the tough problems because frequently the rest of us take an "out of sight, out of mind" approach to issues that make us uncomfortable.

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 them most effective agencies in the neighborhood. Frequently, that agency is a faith-based organization. Leaders of the many faith-based agencies I've had the privilege to visit tell me that they are successful because they look beyond the immediate need. Their focus is helping the client regain hope, and changing a life. Fast fixes are not acceptable to these agencies. These men

and women truly make a difference not only in the life of the client, but also in the community as a whole. We need to determine how we can best encourage and support the work that they do without asking them to compromise their beliefs.

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.

Today we have the great opportunity to talk with providers of a range of faith-based services. We need to understand how the unique element of faith impacts the structure and success of these programs. It is also important that we understand how your programs transform lives by building self-confidence and self-esteem.

Over the last several months we have heard from faith-based providers in San Antonio, Texas, Nashville, Tennessee, Chicago, Illinois, and Charlotte, North Carolina.

Our witnesses today represent just a small fraction of the countless faith-based organizations that meeting the needs of Los Angeles. I expect that our witnesses today will provide us with valuable insights into their work, and the needs of the community. Most importantly, they will help us identify areas and methods by which the government can best assist community organizations of all types provide the best possible care for people in need. I very much look forward to the testimony.