To:

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

2013 Oregon Legislative Session

Attention Sen. Alan Bates, Co-Chair and Rep. Nancy Nathanson, Co-Chair

I am Amber Fitts and this is my story:

At 13 my step-father was emotionally and sexually abusing me. My mother didn't believe me.

Out of desperation, I went to the school counselor and told her I wanted to move out and live with someone else. I asked her to call DHS and report my step-father.

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I was taken by DHS by the end of the school day.

I started drinking and using Meth in my early teens. I stopped a couple years later.

I finished school and later had 3 children-3 boys: প্ৰাণ্ড ক্ষেত্ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰ

My oldest son had some really scary behaviors. One evening, he hurt his younger brother. I stayed up all night crying, worrying, and planning my next move. How could I best help my son? Should I tell DHS? What if they took my son?

I called DHS the next morning and asked to open a voluntary case.

2 days later they took my son and placed him with his Father.

After DHS took my son, I started drinking again...and using Meth.

Shortly thereafter, DHS took my other two sons and placed them in Foster Care. As a second of the se

After 2 months, my son's father was charged with child abuse and the boys were all moved Foster Care.

My boys were then placed in 2 more consecutive Foster Placements.

I gave birth to a baby girl. DHS took her from me at the hospital.

At that point I told my caseworker, "I want to change..." and I asked to be placed in residential treatment.

While still in the hospital, my Caseworker initiated a home inspection. I knew there were drugs in my house but I chose not to call my boyfriend to clean up the house before the inspection.

I just let it happen. I knew I needed help, that's why I didn't call.

I decided I was going to do this for me and my kids - not for anyone else. So, I went to treatment with my infant daughter in tow.

I then established suitable housing.

I started working with a Wraparound team and Family Partner.

My sons were returned to me.

My Family Partner met with me, listened to my concerns, and helped me navigate establishing services for my children.

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This past fall, DHS closed my case.

"Having a peer support partner made all the difference. She shared her own story and she didn't have to. That made me feel like she really knew what I needed. It was like, "Amber, I've been there too and know what you're going through."

I would like everyone with an open DHS case to have a peer support person-otherwise they're just gonna go back to their old ways.

Because of my experiences, I understand how much Addiction and Mental Health Services can help families like mine. Today, I am here to urge you to fund the budget as presented so more families like mine can get the support they need and be successful.

Amber Fitts

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