



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Human Services

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Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on SB 939. The Department of Human Services and Governor's Advocacy Office are neutral on this legislation.

There is significant value in foster children having on-going relationships with their incarcerated parents. When a parent is incarcerated, there are times when the children are placed into foster care when it is determined that no other viable resource is available for them. In these circumstances, it is important to remember that the children are not at fault for their parent's choices. A child's separation from a parent is extremely difficult on any level; however, when a child's parent is incarcerated, there are other factors that may negatively impact the child's well-being. As an example, children of incarcerated parents struggle with social stigma, shame and fear of the unknown. Most children only know of prison from what they have seen in the media, and these children can experience unrealistic, yet deep-seated fears of brutality and inhumane living conditions. Placement in foster care is not an easy situation for children who often struggle with their identity and place in the world. Because they are structurally alienated from their parents, it is incredibly important that they maintain contact with their family and that the family bond is respected as a fundamental foundation.

It is significant to recognize that foster care is meant to be a temporary situation and the ultimate goal is for the child to return to a family member who is safe and able to provide for the needs of the child. When possible, we should allow parent-child bonding to continue even when a parent is incarcerated. An incarcerated parent has a deeper motivation to change when they are allowed opportunities to enhance their parenting skills, to have access to family-strengthening resources, and to remain an active relevant participant in parenting their children.

Sincerely,

Darin Mancuso
Foster Care Ombudsman
State of Oregon

"Assisting People to Become Independent, Healthy and Safe"