

FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN
Portland

March 14, 2017

Senator Rod Monroe, Co-Chair
Representative Barbara Smith Warner, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salen, OR 97301

Dear Senator Monroe and Representative Smith Warner,

I urge you to fully fund the compelling and vital work of the Youth Development Council. The department's expertise, technical support, and grant awards bring together communities and agencies across Oregon to empower our state's opportunity and under-attached youth. As Executive Director of Friends of the Children—Portland, a recipient of Youth & Innovation funding, I can testify to both the cost savings and intangible personal transformations made possible by this program.

At Friends of the Children, we commit to standing alongside our community's highest-priority youth as they work to overcome significant barriers to their success. We proactively select youth when they are in kindergarten and provide them with 1:1 support and guidance from a salaried, professional mentor (called a Friend) for the next 12 ½ years, until they graduate high school. All of our youth face compounding challenges; for instance: 54% do not always have enough to eat at home; 51% have a parent with a known history of substance abuse; 40% have been impacted by domestic violence; 34% have experienced housing instability and/or homelessness; and 39% have lived in foster/kinship care. Despite these barriers, 83% of our program graduates complete high school, 93% avoid the juvenile justice system, and 98% avoid early parenting.

With support from a two-year Youth & Innovation grant, we were able to start and expand groundbreaking collaboration with the Department of Human Services, through which we enroll new youth directly out of the foster care system. Our partnership agreement with DHS outlines a Friend's role as a critical member of a foster care child's support team, and allows for quarterly meetings for Friends and DHS staff to collaborate on service outcomes for individual children. 1 in 3 youth in our program have experienced foster or kinship care, and they have achieved our three long-term outcomes at the same rates as their peers who have not been removed from their homes. By contrast, national statistics show that 42% of foster youth do not graduate high school, and only 1.8% go on to receive post-secondary education or training degrees.

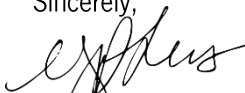
A second one-year award through the Youth & Entrepreneurship track allowed us to kick start an urgent workforce development program enhancement for our young adults. Over the past year, we have integrated a system of career

readiness benchmarks into our core 1:1 programming, increased transition resources to our emerging adults as they navigate challenges after high school, increased flexible scholarship awards as youth seek post-secondary education, and hosted successful college and job fairs targeted specifically to our youth. Thanks to this seed funding, we are now prepared to add a full-time position dedicated to college and career readiness, as well as enter job placement collaborations with corporate partners.

Our program and others like it not only impact the youth we serve, but also benefit society as a whole. Members of the Harvard Business School Association of Oregon conducted an in-depth analysis of the Friends program's social return on investment and determined that every \$1 invested in the organization yields more than \$7.60 in return to the community.

Investing in the positive development of opportunity youth now will significantly reduce future spending on justice, foster care, unemployment, and countless other state systems. Please make this investment and empower more young Oregonians to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Megan Lewis", written in a cursive style.

Megan Lewis
Executive Director