Testimony in Support of HB 2216
Senate Human Services Committee
April 19, 2017

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Olsen, and members of the committee,

My name is Alexis Baska, I am twenty years old and have spent the last five years in Oregon's foster care system. When I entered at the age of fifteen, my father had just passed away, I was taken from my mother, and worst of all, I was separated from my two younger sisters.

I am the oldest of my father's three children and was always told that it was my responsibility to watch over and protect my two sisters as well as being a role model to them. So, that's exactly what I did. Doing their hair and makeup, helping them with homework, and comforting them when they were upset. My sisters were my best friends, no one understood us quite like we understood each other.

Everything changed when I entered the foster care system and went into guardianship with relatives that I was not in contact with. I no longer got to be a part of my sisters lives as hard as I tried to be. I was devastated and gave up all hope of having a relationship with my sisters.

Gone were the inside jokes, the adventures, and the connection that we once had. I asked my lawyers and judge if there was anything that they could do and the only answer I could ever get was, "No" because my sisters were in guardianship and not the foster care system.

Keeping in contact with my siblings would've helped reduce the trauma, anxiety and depression that I experienced. In HB 2216, siblings will be given the right to an adoption placement where sibling contact is encouraged. In the current draft of our first amendment, which I will share in a moment, there should be a conversation with prospective guardians or adoptive parents on how important maintaining sibling contact is, something that I believe would've helped in my case. With the support and information provided by DHS, the odds of keeping a connection with my siblings would've been greater.

Alexis Baska
2017 Legislative Committee Member
Oregon Foster Youth Connection