



February 21, 2019

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Heard, and Members of the Committee,

Re: Support for SB 278

Our support for this legislative concept is based on the foundation provided by the voices of current and former foster youth involved with the Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC). OFYC is a statewide, youth led advocacy group of current and former foster youth between the ages of 14 and 24. OFYC members shape every aspect of what OFYC is, how it is structured, which policies OFYC works on, and what activities OFYC participates in. With support and training from OFYC and Children First for Oregon, youth are empowered to actively participate in the development of policies, programs, and practices that improve the lives of thousands of young people in Oregon's foster care system.

Over 30 OFYC youth came together this summer to develop a set of policy recommendations to address issues they identified within the child welfare system. One of the problems highlighted by the youth was the lack of affordable and safe housing options for current and former foster youth, especially with consideration to LGBTQIA2S+, and other historically marginalized populations.

As we know, we have a housing crisis across Oregon, and former foster youth are one population at significant risk of houselessness in our current housing environment. As part of their most recent policy recommendations, OFYC youth called on all of us to solve this problem by prioritizing housing for all foster youth, current and former, including LGBTQIA2S+ and marginalized youth. Prioritizing housing for foster youth will take a number of steps, but we are very appreciative of Senator Taylor for exploring options for how to take positive steps forward through expanding the Rent Guarantee Program to current and former foster youth.

We support the amendment to expand the eligible age range to ages 16 - 27, because that will provide additional flexibility for former foster youth to access this program during these key years after they transition out of foster care, and help avoid a cliff of losing access to services.

There is much work to be done to better support youth who age out of foster care without permanency, and we look forward to discussing SB 745 Expanding Transition Services for Foster Youth with you in a couple of weeks. We hope that as part of the implementation of SB 278 there can be conversations about how to link Rent Well classes with the Independent Living Program (ILP) services, to lower barriers to access for those youth eligible for ILP services.

We ask for your support for SB 278. Thank you for your time.

Chris Coughlin, Legislative Director