



Good Afternoon Co-Chair Beyer and Co-Chair Nosse,

For the record, my name is Mary Laws and I am a former foster parent. My husband and I are twenty-five year veterans of the Treatment Foster Care Oregon program, or "TFCO," in Lane County. We served more than seventy high-needs children in our time as therapeutic foster parents, mostly young women and girls. It was the most powerful experience of my life.

For those of you who haven't heard of TFCO it is a comprehensive training and support program which includes positive parenting training for foster parents, foster parent peer-support groups, therapy, for youth and their aftercare parents, crisis planning, a daily behavior management plan, daily check ins, data collection, and 24/7 on-call support . TFCO is for therapeutic foster families and for the foster children who have significant challenges including serious mental health problems and trauma.

There are many great things about TFCO, but for me, the best part of the Treatment Foster Care Oregon program was how it simplified my role. In the complex lives of these young people I was supported by TFCO to focus on loving and supporting the kids in my care, advocate for them, and at the same time leave the clinical work to clinicians. In this way TFCO allowed me to be a parent to these children, which in turn allowed them the space they needed to heal.

One of our kiddos, we'll call her June, a young woman sixteen years old and standing six feet two inches tall, was full of anger and troubled by violence and aggression when she came to live with us. No one else would take June in, but we knew that with the help of the TFCO if anyone could help this girl, it was us. The support staff at TFCO wrapped around her and our family and a new young woman began to emerge. The difference was staggering. That young lady went from harassment and assault to becoming a tender big sister and ultimately gave a speech about the impact TFCO had on her life at her graduation ceremony.

When I learned about the proposed expansion of the TFCO program to serve 200 more youth and families I was overcome with hope. And that is the most valuable feeling you get as a supported foster parent in TFCO, hope. There is an overwhelming sense that you are part of a team providing an opportunity for a child to change the trajectory of not only their future, but in many cases the future of their entire family. I know because I am in contact with nearly all of the kiddos I once parented and now I am honored to say that many of their children call me grandma.

Thank you for taking public comment on this crucial program. I urge you to support the Governor's Child Welfare, Foster Care Budget as recommended.

Mary Laws, Retired Treatment Foster Care Oregon Parent