

Good Morning Chair Beyer, Chair Nosse and members of the Committee. My name is Jessica Lloyd-Rogers and I am a former foster parent and the current President of the Oregon Foster Parent Association. We represent an estimated 5000 volunteers across Oregon who we call foster parents including those who are certified by private agencies, tribal agencies, and the Oregon Youth Authority. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

In the past the legislature has passed legislation that has made being a foster parent an impossible choice for many even when they believe in the mission. Passing the Governor's child welfare budget will make a positive difference to foster parents by funding programs and groups that provide training and supports. In addition, OFPA stands squarely beside DHS in advocating for more funding to lower caseloads for workers on the front lines.

Surveys of foster parents repeatedly show that two of the top needs identified by foster parents are communication and training. Lower caseloads, the KEEP and TFCO support services and training for foster parents will help answer these needs. Even with the best intentions, overloaded caseworkers don't have the time for the frequent communication necessary to adequately support foster parents who are under fire every day. Given the trauma and high level of needs children are coming into care with, the current training simply does not adequately provide the therapeutic knowledge and skills to not only safely care for the young people in their homes, but to give them the tools and training to become confident, competent, successful adults.

The Oregon Foster Parent Association also supports those portions of the budget that support youth. We are specifically in favor of the portions relating to Independent Living Services and healthy relationships trainings that support youth who are transitioning out of care. While foster parents contribute to readying youth to transition, ILP services formalize the process and make sure that basic readiness knowledge is delivered in a focused, logical manner. In addition to 'adulting' survival skills, ILP training also give the young person the opportunity to form a supportive relationship with another caring adult. We all know that a young person who has a variety of supportive adults in their circle is more successful than those who don't.

Foster youth in care often don't have the opportunity to experience healthy relationships. Many don't know what that even looks like, which puts them at a higher risk for victimization, sexual assault, battery and domestic violence. Healthy relationship training and the ability to recognize 'red flags' will help young people break the cycle and build new healthy ways to relate. In some cases, this will mean empowering them with the training to break a cycle that is generations long. Surviving and thriving as an adult isn't only about know how to rent an apartment or open a bank account, it is all about navigating one's way through many kinds of relationships. Learning about healthy relationships is a survival skill every bit as important as the practical things.

I come before you to testify today not only as an advocate and representative of foster parents who want to have a positive impact but as a survivor of the foster care system. Two days after my 14th birthday, I fled house and family in order to escape a savage daily violence. After years on the street I was swept up by the State and put in foster care where I aged out. I'm a survivor. I had to make it up as I went along, and it was hard, heartbreaking and sometimes dangerous. I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm here to advocate for the young people in care today who will age out. I want them to have the opportunities to transition into the wider world, knowing that despite their time in care (and maybe because of their time in care), they have the capacity, tools and training to become the successful adults they want to be. As representatives and guardians of Oregon children and youth in care, I ask that you pass the Governor's Child Welfare budget and help make this more possible.