

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Heard, Members of the Committee, My name is Nathaniel Schwab and I'm from Marion County, Salem Oregon.

I was in foster care for a little over a year and a half right before I turned 16 with my, at the time, 7 year old sister.

I am here today as a Member of Oregon Foster Youth Connection to support SB 745.

Oregon Foster Youth Connection is a youth led program with a focus on advocacy and youth/young adult development. It's coordinated by Members who are former and current foster youth from ages 14-25.

During Oregon Foster Youth Connection's Policy Conference in July of 2018, youth identified and voted out of our 10 policy recommendations. The biggest solution for youth in care to become better equipped with the tools they needed was to have additional support around becoming independent young adults. Youth voted on expanding ILP services because of the many benefits that the program offered.

A transitional service that helped me tremendously while I was in care was the Independent Living Program (ILP).

I was initially pessimistic of the possibility of expanding services because I know that asking for this much in terms of the budget was going to be very difficult. What changed that for me was seeing the reach and impression that ILP left on these youth in care. In the light of a recession, *if* we reduce funding for transitional services, we are also reducing the opportunities that are offered to youth to develop skills.

ILP provides exceptional supports that DHS case workers typically cannot provide. DHS case workers simply do not have the time to educate youth about essential soft skills a youth would receive through (lived) experience from growing up with their parents.

ILP helped me create a resume, apply for jobs and take classes to learn more about cooking and other essential life skills. ILP also helped me with getting gift cards and vouchers for clothing, something that is often overlooked as well as utilize the supply closet they had at the office for toothpaste and shampoo.

ILP is another opportunity for youth to build a lasting connections while in care. Youth can build these relationships with not only their service providers, but also other youth participating in ILP services. Opportunities for youth to build long lasting relationships

while in care can create better outcomes for youth, even after aging out. This is important for youth who are aging out because as youth who have been through foster care, there is typically a lack of peer support and healthy role models for most youth. These youth do not have the same privileges as others to focus on building relationships which can be contributed to many factors, including; constant moves which can lead to school changes, counseling or therapy appointments from past traumas, and the inability to spend time developing friendships.

For me personally, having the extra support from peers and my ILP (Support Staff) allowed me to creatively solve problems. While in care, I did not have a helmet or lock for my new bike. I was able to get a new helmet and lock from a local business in town that provided the local ILP program with vouchers. With community partnerships, businesses are able to provide time and resources to youth in care in a collaborative way with ILP offices.

As young adults in care, getting a car or a job is much more difficult than the average youth in a family. We often struggle and feel overwhelmed about thinking or planning for our future *because we are solving so many problems now*. Some youth may have significant difficulties ranging from past trauma to the fear of where they or their siblings might sleep next.

They do not have the tools they need to be able to find a solution to their most difficult problems.

ILP provide these tools.

ILP provides direct opportunities for personal development, applying to college, filling out resumes, finding a car and how to apply for apartments with the help of an ILP staff.

The passing of SB 745 will largely expand transitional services, services that youth learn the skills needed to successfully transition out of care. This will require case plans to include meetings to explain the available transition services for youth. SB 745 also intends to make ILP services available to those in residential treatment facilities.

Expanding these services throughout the state is congruent with OFYC's vision to ensure that all children and youth in the foster care system, from the youngest to those aging-out, *are well cared for and empowered to succeed*.

Thank You.