

March 13, 2019

Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Thomsen, and members of the Committee,

RE: Senate Bill 158

My name is Grace LoVerde and I am an Independent Living Coach with New Avenues for Youth in Portland, Oregon and I am an alumni of foster care. I currently reside in Washington County. My testimony has been submitted as an exhibit.

As an Independent Living Coach, I provide individualized case management and resource brokerage to increase youth's self-sufficiency and independence as they transition out of foster care. When working with students who are transitioning to College we always seek out resources and connections for our students. In my experience as a Coach, the institutions that have foster care specific programming are better equipped to meet the needs of the youth we serve. Such as Portland Community College's Links Programs. These programs provide a place where students with a background in foster care may connect to a specialized advisor and coach to receive necessary supports as they navigate college. As someone supporting youth from outside of the college system I don't have the ability to connect students to the same resources as staff from within the university do, and this is a barrier I often face with youth.

For college-bound youth in care, most have plans to transfer to a four-year university but many get lost in the community college system because of a lack of individualized guidance. A significant amount of the youth I serve are first-generation college students and when they step foot on campus it doesn't always feel like they belong and it's hard for them to know where to start. As an alumni of care and first generation college graduate I found success in the determination I had to achieve my goals and through leaning on the few tools that I had, but this was mostly on my own. It was only after graduating college that I learned of all the resources that could have helped me during the times I was struggling both academically and financially. I can only imagine how I would have been able to thrive if I had individualized support to help me navigate college. Senate Bill 158 could make it possible for more youth in care to have a story of thriving in their journey through college.

A fundamental component of college is helping students cultivate their career goals, this requires that students are connected to more than just their classes. We know there are many financial supports and resources for these students, but connections to a resource prepared to serve youth in care and a dedicated program could help keep these students from falling through the cracks. Senate Bill 158 calls out the need for community colleges and four year universities to have specific programs for students that have experience in foster care to receive the support they need to be successful in college. It has been my experience that this gap in transition services for alumni of care is a significant barrier in them transferring to a four year university. Having access to a program that offers the resources needed to transition can only serve as a catalyst to open doors and allow for the success of this population during this crucial time.

Providing youth in foster care with support like this is exactly what Senate Bill 158 would do. Thank you for your time.



Grace LoVerde, BSW  
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New Avenues for Youth

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