

HB 3383

DHS Child Welfare

Good afternoon members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing.

My name is Mary Starrett, serving my second term as a Yamhill County Commissioner and Board liaison to Yamhill County Health and Human Services. I am a foster child mentor, and serve on the boards of several child welfare agencies.

I'm here to speak in support of HB 3383.

Families in crisis involving the DHS Child Welfare system have reached out for help and I found there was nothing I could do to help nor was I alone. Fellow commissioners from across the state that I met with at the Association of Oregon Counties expressed the same frustration.

I found that Utah's child welfare program has significantly lower foster care rates and a state audit they can be proud of. (le.utah.gov/audit/13_01rpt.pdf)

We know it can be done. The state of Utah has reduced the number of children in foster care by working with families to address the reasons why children face removal.

Oregon has a 30% higher removal rate than other states.

We'd like to change that statistic, so Yamhill County has embarked on a project.

Currently a team of consultants Cindy Becker, Mickey Lansing and Vickie Fleming, each with decades of child welfare experience, are working on a collective impact strategy that will leverage health, education, DHS, and justice-related public resources to enhance overall individual, family and community resilience.

The contract we've committed considerable time and resources to will function as a roadmap to develop a plan to:

- 1) Create more community and family supports before children are removed, see fewer children placed in foster care, fewer moves within foster placements, fewer out of county placements.
- 2) Better prepare foster providers and improve respite and education.
- 3) Improve communication from DHS to families and community partners and change the culture from one of authority, judgement, and blame to one of collaboration, hope, and recovery.
- 4) Ensure local oversight and accountability for DHS child welfare functions, including an independent parent navigator component, a robust community review board, and providers who are empowered to voice concerns and/or challenge the status quo in order to make improvements without fear of retaliation.
- 5) To reduce child abuse and neglect rates in Yamhill County.

We know we can significantly improve outcomes for children and families because Yamhill County is already acknowledged as a statewide leader in community-based supports including our Yamhill CCO's behavioral health network which has the highest rate of integrated behaviorists in the state of Oregon. Add to that our close partnership with the Housing Authority of Yamhill County which includes on site supportive housing units, a new peer assisted crisis center, partnerships with Yamhill County Action Partnership (YCAP) social service agency and connections to all 7 school districts.

We work closely with local law enforcement agencies, the Department of Community Justice, DHS, George Fox University, Lutheran Community Services, Safe Families, Provoking Hope, Catholic

Community Services, local hospitals and healthcare providers like Virginia Garcia, PMC, Providence, local independent licensed practitioners for behavioral health services, regional hospitals for psychiatric acute care, medical detox, residential treatment for addictions and many more agencies and organization with a focus on families and youth.

At the core of our community model we will leverage what we're doing now for parents/foster parents so that they may receive supports such as the county's innovative Transitional Treatment Recovery Services-working in partnership with Yamhill County Health and Human Services and Department of Human Services (Child Welfare) to support men and women who are transitioning to a Recovery Lifestyle and supporting them in home services of recovery support. The underlying premise being that if given the appropriate evidence-based programs and community supports, most families can succeed and we will increase the percentage of children who stay in safe homes within Yamhill County.

We have the opportunity to do something different, innovative, and exciting to improve child welfare in our county and in our state.

Please support a pilot project to add another tool for our state to address its child welfare crisis.