



April 3, 2019

Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair Sprenger, Vice-Chair Gorsek, and Members of the Committee,

RE: Children First for Oregon urges support of HB 2849

Children First represents the interests of Oregon's nearly 875,000 children and believes that together, with communities and leaders across the state, we can build a state where all children thrive. Through the development of the Children's Agenda we work with our more than 110 partner organizations to identify and elevate legislative concepts that will support the needs of Oregon's children. HB 2849 is part of the 2019 Children's Agenda.

We must acknowledge that racism is prevalent within and across systems, including child welfare. Due to systemic barriers, bias, and discrimination, **children of color are overrepresented in foster care**. Black children make up 3.6% of Oregon's children, yet were 6% of the children served in foster care in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017. Native children are 1.6% of Oregon's children, but 5.2% of the children served in foster care during FFY 2017.

We believe that we all need to work together to elevate the importance of child abuse prevention efforts including investing in programs that help by economically stabilizing families, enacting policies and funding programs to provide stable housing, universally offering home visiting, and increasing access to mental health services, substance use treatments, parenting education, and other prevention programs through the implementation of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act. As Children First and our partners advocate for systemic prevention programs to lower the number of children entering the child welfare system, we need to be sure that the system we use to remove children is one that is necessary for child safety, and puts standards in place that will help mitigate bias that may lead to higher rates of removal for children of color.

We appreciate all the work that was done during the interim to craft this legislation and encourage your support so that we ensure Oregon's standard for taking a child into protective custody without a court order keeps children safe while complying with the constitutional standard.

Thank you very much for your attention and service. We request your support of HB 2849.

Sincerely,

Chris Coughlin  
Legislative Director