

Hello, my name is Hanna Dekker and I'm here representing OFYC. OFYC stands for Oregon Foster Youth Connections. Today I am here to talk about ILP. ILP stands for Independent Living Program. OFYC is currently asking the Legislature to pass SB 745 to expand ILP services and expand the age group that they impact from 16 to 21 to 14 to 23.

I have recently aged out of care, and even though I currently live at New Meadows, a program through ILP for foster youth aging out of care, statistics show in 2018, one-third of the 21 year olds who had been in care at age 17 reported being homeless in the previous two years. The opportunities for us after we age out are very slim. In 2016, nearly three in four foster youth ages 16 or older in Oregon transition out of care without being reunited or connected to a family, compared to about half of foster youth nationwide.

Currently, there are approximately 2,205 teens in care and 21% of Oregon's foster care population are 14 years of age or older. Just under half of eligible youth, approximately 1,300 youth, received ILP services in 2017. There is inconsistent services throughout the state, this bill will help strengthen the programming across the state. ILP struggles with workforce issues such as high turnover of ILP staff and non competitive wages. Both SB 745 and Policy Option Package (POP) 142 address these issues.

ILP services help with building skills you don't usually learn in school and most youth don't learn anywhere else. Through ILP, foster youth receive support in learning a range of skills, including completing high school, renting their first apartment, finding employment, budgeting for expenses, time management, and applying to college. ILP also gives youth the opportunity to establish supportive relationships with adults and build community with other youth who share the unique experience of transitioning out of care. The New Meadows program I mentioned earlier as I said helps foster youth age out of care and they can stay here after they turn 21 and can stay here a max of 2 years. This building has room for 14 youth including 4 parenting rooms. Having more housing options like this for foster youth to access is a necessity, SB 745 and the funding in POP 142 will help build a base for this process to begin.

Stereotypically, foster youth are looked at as the part of society that's "least likely to succeed". Some of us hear that on a regular basis and sometimes it's hard to not believe it, but some of us will still push to prove this stereotype wrong. Passing this bill with funding will help foster youth beat this stereotype and be one step closer to reaching our dream goals and succeeding in life. Thank you for listening to me today.