

“Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Williams, members of the committee, my name is Hannah Royal and I’m from Corvallis, OR in Benton county. I am currently 23 years old and in my Masters program at OSU. I am also a member of Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) and spent time in foster care from the ages of 14-21. I was in Independent Living Programs (ILP) in both Douglas and Benton counties during this time.

I’m here to talk with you today about OFYC’s legislative priority for 2020: HB 4120 - Expanding Transition Services for Foster Youth. The legislative concept for the bill was proposed when youth developed a 10 point list during OFYC’s Policy Conference in 2018 to improve child welfare and provide more supports for children and youth in foster care. Expanding ILP services rose to the top of this list. Last session, we were disappointed that SB 745 was not funded when the Legislature failed to act on a funding recommendation to stabilize ILP providers. Youth don't give up and we're back with a very focused investment in this important work.

Oregon ILP gives youth the opportunity to have a greater chance of being more successful when they transition out of care. Through ILP, foster youth receive support from an ILP worker, or “coach,” while learning a range of skills including completing high school, creating a resume, cooking and caring for themselves, getting a driver’s license or state ID, renting their first apartment, budgeting for expenses, and filling out financial aid forms. 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. When I was in ILP, I was able to receive help preparing for college, paying for a deposit and items like furniture and appliances for my first rental, budgeting for various expenses during college, and navigating relationships with roommates. My ILP workers helped me with so much when I was transitioning out of foster care and I can’t imagine what I would have done had I not had their help.

In the federal fiscal year of 2016, 2,205 youth in care (21% of Oregon’s foster care population) were 14 years of age or older. Just under half of eligible youth received ILP services in both 2017 and 2018. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) data tells us that in the federal fiscal year of 2018, one-third (32%) of the 21 year olds who had been in care in Oregon at age 17 reported being homeless in the previous two years. These are youth who are eligible for ILP services. I worry these youth were not offered ILP services due to lack of funding or staff.

No youth is required to participate in Independent Living Programs, but they seek these services because they know it helps them become successful adults.

HB 4120 asks for an additional \$2 million for transition services for foster youth through Oregon's ILP. If passed, ILP providers will be stabilized so they continue their important work. This investment will result in more "coaches," create smaller caseloads, and serve up to 200 more youth in the ILP program statewide.

I am asking on behalf of foster youth in Oregon that you support this bill. I am giving back to my community by becoming a high school biology teacher, and I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without the help of ILP. I am still connected to my ILP workers. They have been there for me both when I graduated high school and graduated college. My ILP workers have even been invited to my wedding. I have such a strong support network due to the efforts of my ILP workers and I feel more confident in myself and my abilities due to ILP. By supporting this bill, you are supporting youth like me to have a better chance at a promising future."