



2685 4th Street NE • Salem, Oregon • 97301 • LibertyHouseCenter.org • P: 503-540-0288 • F: 503-540-0293

February 3, 2020

Representative Alissa Keny-Guyer, Chair
Representative Ron Noble, Vice-Chair
Representative Anna Williams, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Human Services and Housing
Oregon Legislative Assembly
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 4112

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chairs Noble and Williams:

On behalf of Liberty House and the children in Marion and Polk Counties, I write to support **HB 4112**, and **support increasing funding to Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) by \$3M for the remainder of this biennium 2019-21**. The child advocacy centers across Oregon desperately need this funding. For some reason, child abuse seems to be increasing statewide at a rate faster than we can keep up with, and without this funding which is needed to help hire more staff, the incidence of serious physical injury and death will continue to rise. I know this is not what any of us want to see for children in Oregon. CAC's play a crucially important role in diagnosing, stopping and treating child abuse. They employ the specialists who provide medical diagnoses, forensic interviewing, family support, and care coordination pursuant to ORS Chapter 418. The CACs work closely with all the multidisciplinary team partners including child protective services workers.

The Oregon Legislature has poured substantial resources into the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) in order to help it fulfill its mission. What must be understood is that the DHS child protective services workers (CPS) who go out to homes and assess the safety of children are put in the position of making critically important decisions that involve a medical component. As part of a nationwide best practice and pursuant to the mandate of Karly's Law (ORS 419B.022-024), they should be consistently using their local CAC's for medical evaluation, forensic interviewing, and victim advocacy during the investigation phase. Using the local CAC allows the child to be seen by a medical provider with the necessary qualifications to determine whether abuse has occurred. That, in turn, increases the likelihood of sound decision making when it comes to evaluating the safety of the child – the core mission of CPS workers.

However, the current level of state funding to CAC's is embarrassingly inadequate, funding only 17% of what it costs to operate. That means CAC's are closed when they should be open, have few appointments available when many are needed, and lack the staff to triage cases in real time on the phone with the CPS worker on a consistent basis. The lack of funding blocks children from getting the help they need when they need it and makes the job of the CPS worker monumentally more difficult. In effect, the Legislature is asking the CPS workers to do extremely difficult work and not giving them the most important tool they need to do that work successfully.

Approving this funding would correct that problem. This funding would help to increase CAC medical and forensic interviewing staff availability and open up more appointments for children who need them. It is one of the surest way to protect the record-breaking investment being made in DHS.

I have served as the CEO of Liberty House for over six years. During that time, the number of calls to the hotline has exploded; over 10,500 in Marion County and approximately 1,200 in Polk County last year. **The business of triaging child abuse requires a knowledgeable and well-trained medical provider to help the CPS worker sift through all the issues and determine the nature of the injuries, the likelihood that the injuries were due to abuse, or the likelihood that sexual child abuse occurred. This is a highly specialized field of medicine and over time the research has prompted the development of child advocacy centers in order to provide comprehensive assessments and assist the investigating agencies. Lack of access to these centers can be catastrophic, and in some cases, fatal for a child. Lack of funding has contributed to a serious lack of access.**

As a lawyer with long experience in Oregon public policy, I join the voices of researchers who have plainly said that physical and sexual child abuse is the “most costly public health issue in the United States,”¹ and that investing in its diagnosis, treatment and prevent would go a long way toward drastically reducing the costly effects of substance abuse, mental illness, chronic disease, homelessness, and youth suicide.

This modest \$3M funding increase is unfinished business from the 2019 Session and is a necessary investment for us to meet rapidly increasing needs.

CACs provide a collaborative, child-centered approach to child abuse response. In partnership with schools, law enforcement, DHS, district attorneys, juvenile justice, mental health services and others, CACs help ensure that trauma is reduced in the event of an investigation of child abuse.

CACs are a sound investment.

- **Involvement with a CAC increases successful prosecutions, which ensures justice—and helps protect additional and future victims**
- Evidence gathered at a CAC helps avoid costly trials because the taped interview and medical findings can be clear, consistent, and more difficult for defense attorneys to discredit on behalf of those accused
- **Centers have been shown to save up to \$1000 per case**
- **CACs help initiate healing by providing a special kind of therapy (Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or TFCBT) that is shown to reduce symptoms of PTSD in less visits than other therapy models**
- The CDC estimates that the lifetime economic impact of confirmed child maltreatment is over \$830,000 per victim. CACs play a major role in improving the lives of children through protection, healing, and prevention of continued abuse. Investing in CACs and supporting child abuse victims NOW, will reduce costs down the line in crime, addiction, mental and physical health issues, and more.
- Investing in Centers is a way to prioritize children no matter where they live in the state. It is bigger than any one district and goes a long way to ensure justice for many of Oregon's children. In many rural counties, there is a lack of private resources and no ability to successfully fundraise for medical providers and other experts.

¹ Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD, The Body Keeps the Score, p. 150. New York: Penguin (2014).

Thank you for your leadership and thank you for listening to the pleas of leaders across Oregon who are working unsustainably long hours to keep the doors of these CACs open. The demand for our services is at a record high level and we can't save lives without addition state funding.

Being an elected official is a demanding, 24/7 mission and I admire you for being one of Oregon's tireless leaders. If there is anything I could do for you or if there are questions I might answer, please do call and I will do my very best.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alison Kelley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'y' at the end.

Alison S. Kelley, JD