



ABC House

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*ABC House is the
Child Abuse
Intervention Center
serving Benton and
Linn Counties.*



Community Partner



NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
ALLIANCE®
ACCREDITED MEMBER

February 3, 2020

House Committee on Human Services and Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 4112

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Williams, Vice Chair Noble and Members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing:

My name is Jenny Gilmore-Robinson and I am the Executive Director of ABC House, the children's advocacy center (CAC) that has served Benton and Linn counties for almost 23 years. I write today to ask for your strong support of HB 4112 and the countless children it will protect.

CACs like ABC House are the most effective means of ensuring that children are not further traumatized by the system that was designed to protect them. Working closely with law enforcement, DHS and the medical community, we provide compassionate expert and forensic care by child abuse experts, including physicians specializing in child abuse medicine, specially trained forensic interviewers, and mental health providers experienced in trauma treatments that are proven to help children heal. Without us, children would be questioned in police stations, treated in chaotic emergency rooms, and forced to share their experiences repeatedly, with multiple people who are not working together.

But we cannot do it alone. Demand for our services continues to rise and we are unable to meet the need without help. Like many counties around the state, Linn and Benton counties are each experiencing increases in the number of child abuse investigations; according to the *2018 Oregon Child Welfare Data Book*, assessments in Benton County increased by 8% and by a staggering 30% in Linn County.

Without additional funding, ABC House cannot begin to serve these children in the way they deserve.

In the last six months alone, we received 135 suspicious physical injury referrals under Karly's Law yet had the capacity to do on-site medical exams for **only 13% of those children**. The rest were served only through a photo consultation by our physicians and then referred to the child's primary care physician, urgent care or emergency room for an exam, in consultation with our physicians. To be clear, a consultation is not at all comparable to a complete physical exam; injuries not documented in the photos could go undetected and the level of risk underestimated. Recently, a child referred to ABC House for injuries on his arm was found to have over thirty bruises on his trunk and torso. None of these injuries had been observed or photo-documented by the investigator because the investigator simply did not ask the child to lift his shirt.

Moreover, a medical provider doing the follow-up exam at urgent care or the emergency room is most likely not an expert in child abuse medicine, which is why these providers consult with us extensively on their own cases. We are grateful for their partnership and their continued willingness to reach out for support. They will be the first to tell you that the limited time allotted for treating each patient at an ER or urgent care clinic simply does not allow for gathering all of the sensitive information necessary to diagnosis child maltreatment.

CAC services are critical to the safety and wellbeing of children. In 2019, ABC House served over 700 children, including providing medical exams and forensic interviews to 273 children referred for a wide variety of concerns, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, drug endangerment and witnessing violence. Each of these children received care, support and a path toward healing.

But it's not enough; there are countless more children out there needing help.

Passing HB 4112 will make a huge difference in children's lives. For ABC House it would mean being able to employ more child abuse physicians and mental health counselors so that all children who need it can receive expert care they deserve. We know that without intervention, children experiencing trauma are more likely to suffer adverse health outcomes, mental illness and academic struggles. The research is clear: these children in pain grow up to be adults in pain, suffering long-term health consequences, including substance abuse, depression and even heart disease and cancer.

With your help, we can break the cycle of abuse by intervening to keep children safe from future abuse and to help them heal. We need your support of HB 4112 to help us be there for more children who need us.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Gilmore-Robinson
Executive Director