

To: Senate Judiciary Committee
Date: February 24, 2020
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Children's Institute
Re: Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act (HB 4148)

The Children's Institute is writing in support of the Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act (HB 4148). This legislation will support building resilience in Native children. Evidence and experience tell us that it is important for healthy development to support Native children to understand their tribal heritage. Studies have shown that the development of positive racial and ethnic identity are more resilient against experiences of trauma (such as abuse, neglect, and removal from their family).

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was established in 1978 in response to a staggering 25 to 35% of American Indian and Alaskan Native children being placed in foster care. Since the establishment of ICWA, fewer children are being removed from their families. However, disparities remain. Here in Oregon, Native children are placed in foster care at the highest rate of any Oregon children, and are 2.3 times as likely as Caucasian children to be in foster care.

Codifying ICWA in Oregon is a first step toward making progress on this disparity in the child welfare system. Passing this statute will also support improved training and compliance with ICWA.

Thank you for your support of HB 4148.