



March 30, 2021

Good Afternoon Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Nosse, and Members of the Human Services Sub-Committee of Ways and Means,

My name is Marissa Cade and I am a former foster parent to a high acuity special needs kiddo, and an ongoing chosen mom. I also have the honor of serving as the facilitator of the Foster Homes of Healing Coalition now in our fourth year of advocacy. Foster Homes of Healing is a ten member coalition. Our primary purpose is to elevate the quality of foster care in Oregon through legislative advocacy. We stand in support of preserving the current Child Welfare budget, including the many programs children and families need, and recommend investing in additional casework staff, as outlined in the Governor's recommended budget.

Over the last few years, we have been successful helping to improve the child foster care system with the help and partnership of the Oregon Legislature, Governor Brown, the Department of Human Services, and many community partners. In 2019 your investment brought increased support and training to foster parents statewide. To date, the KEEP program has served over 1,400 families with specialized training and support in all 36 Oregon counties. That's 1,400 foster parents who are significantly more likely to keep fostering, 1,400 kiddos who are far less likely to experience a placement disruption, 1,400 foster youth who are more likely to do well in school, 1,400 parents who report being significantly less stressed in their parenting role. While 1,400 is a great start, it's just the beginning. More and more families enroll in online KEEP groups every day. As the positive feedback from participating families continues to roll in we look forward to the state's investment to make sure that every Oregon foster family has the chance to be a KEEP family.

Your investment in the previous biennium also created a pathway to bring on hundreds of additional therapeutic foster families. Therapeutic Foster Care provides kiddos with acute behavioral needs with the 24-7 care and crisis support they need, while allowing them to remain safely in supported family settings. This investment is the beginning of the end of undue congregate care, and out of state placements. Right now agencies across the state are gearing up to start training for an expanded roster of therapeutic foster parents. This increased capacity will be critical in providing adequate placements for kiddos with higher needs. We know that the number of children and youth coming into care is likely to increase with the

return to school and social life. We must be prepared to serve these children in the best way possible, in a family environment.

While KEEP, Treatment Foster Care, and the myriad of other programs and supports Child Welfare provides need to be cherished and maintained, we also must invest in the casework staff we need to make it all work. When caseloads are too high caseworkers have less time to connect and really get to know children and families, which makes it harder to know what resources they need to be successful. When caseloads are too high, caseworkers have less time to spend investigating allegations, and helping families avoid removal. Less time and bandwidth for caseworkers can mean the difference between a child safely and successfully remaining home, or enduring the trauma of being removed into care.

For all the above reasons, Foster Homes of Healing urges the Human Services Subcommittee of Ways and Means to support the DHS Child Welfare Budget and the Governor's recommendations for funding. With your help, Oregon can continue to create an improved and thriving Child Welfare system for Oregon families, dependent youth, and foster families.