

March 29, 2021

RE: ODHS Policy Option Package 110

Dear Co—Chairs Lieber and Nosse, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services,

My name is Diana Stuart. I am a retired Senior Circuit Court Judge and have been a member of the Youth Progress Board of Directors for the last two years. I became involved with Youth Progress because of the many cases I saw as a Juvenile Court Judge in which I was convinced that our system failures were creating an inevitable assembly line that took young people of potential and dumped them into adult corrections.

As a judge, when I felt that placement of a youth into OYA was necessary for community safety or best met the programming needs of a young offender, I tracked the progress of these youth while at OYA. Sadly, I frequently saw that young people who did well in the structured programming of youth corrections, fell apart upon their return to the community due to a lack of appropriate assistance transitioning into the community. Similarly, a lack of stable culturally appropriate foster families willing to work with young people transitioning out of foster care into adulthood created a crossover of foster youth into both juvenile and adult corrections.

The Mission Statement of Youth Progress is

At Youth Progress we believe that young people in the juvenile justice and foster care systems are leaders, scholars, artists, athletes, and entrepreneurs.

Together, we are a diverse and inclusive community of staff and foster parents who provide young people with safe and stable housing and opportunities to grow, learn, and succeed.

This simple statement should say it all. What we want for all our children should be what we want – and should insist upon - for the children for which we are personally and professionally responsible. We should want their success in life. And therefore, it must be a priority to adequately fund the services which will foster such success.

I am writing in support of Option Package 110 which is critical to adequately fund the kinds of BRS programs that can help our young people have a life – not a prison/corrections number. To program well, we need skilled staff who can earn a living wage – not be forced into a “Sophie’s Choice” – whether to support their family or continuing work in which they believe and are invested. Too many cannot afford to continue in these low paying jobs. Additionally, the inability to recruit at the level BRS programs require and the rapid turnover in BRS program staff cripples the capacity of programs like Youth Progress to perform at the level our youth need and deserve. Turn-over is a constant financial drain on program resources. Prevailing wages for our staff are well deserved by them and it is shameful that skilled staff can earn more working at an Amazon warehouse than in an Oregon BRS program.

I urge you to support Option Package 110. It is an essential budget provision that will allow us to continue to provide services that will allow our young people to transition into healthy adulthood and realize their potential as *artists, scholars, athletes, leaders, and entrepreneurs*.

Thank you,

Diana I Stuart
Senior Judge