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March 30, 2021

Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Re: Support for SB 5529

Co-chair Lieber, Co-Chair Nosse, and members of the committee, my name is Lisa McMahon and I'm submitting this testimony as the Program Director of Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC), a program of Our Children Oregon.

Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) is a statewide, youth led advocacy group of current and former foster youth between the ages of 14 and 24. OFYC members shape every aspect of what OFYC is, how it is structured, which policies we work on, and what activities we participate in. With support and training from OFYC and Our Children Oregon, youth are empowered to actively participate in the development of policies, programs, and practices that improve the lives of thousands of young people in Oregon's foster care system.

I am writing to urge you to support the ODHS Child Welfare core budget and additional investments in SB 5529. Director Jones Gaston presented a powerful Vision for Transformation to this committee last week - a vision that all children deserve to experience safe, stable, healthy lives and grow up in the care of a loving family and community. Youth members of OFYC believe this too! There is a lot of work to be done to stabilize these support systems, but with the commitment of the Child Welfare Agency to work closely with current and former foster youth, Tribes, communities of color, and families we can make progress.

Oregon Foster Youth Connection has worked closely with ODHS and the Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission co-chairs on HB 2505 to create an equity committee within the Commission. The funding in SB 5529 (POP 115) is essential for that committee to be established and for the Commission to function effectively. Additionally, the Family First Prevention Services Act is a tool to help transform how Oregon approaches child welfare. We support the \$4.6 million investment in SB 5529 to begin to build the



P.O. Box 14694
Portland, OR 97293
503.236.9754
ourchildrenoregon.org



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Family Preservation and Prevention Program infrastructure. This will ensure that Child Welfare has the capacity to serve families so that children and youth aren't removed.

We hope you consider a few additional investments to be included in the final version of HB 5529. OFYC urges an investment in the state's Independent Living Program services as outlined in HB 2340. This was the priority of OFYC members in both the 2019 and 2020 sessions. Children in foster care are the state's children - it's the state's responsibility to help them learn the skills needed to succeed as adults. Investing in this program is an important step to help make that a reality. I also urge you to fund the expanded supports for houseless youth (HB 2544) to help significantly decrease the rate of houslessness experienced by young adults, including former foster youth. It is crucial to maintain awareness of this issue, especially during the COVID 19 pandemic.

It is also important to continue investing in the Children's System of Care so that children, youth, and families have access to the services that fit their individual needs at the time that provides the most benefit.

It is crucial that Child Welfare services are fully and appropriately funded. The programs and services that I have highlighted above will improve the child welfare system, but need the funding to do so. I urge you to support the child welfare core budget and additional investments in SB 5529.

Lisa McMahan
Program Director
Oregon Foster Youth Connection
Our Children Oregon



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Portland, OR 97293
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