

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am the Executive Director at KIDS Center, the child advocacy center serving Central Oregon, based in Bend. Our mission at KIDS Center is to prevent, evaluate and treat child abuse. We provide a full spectrum of services including medical examinations, forensic interviews, family advocacy, therapy, and abuse prevention for children and families who may have experienced physical or sexual abuse, neglect, witnessed domestic violence, or are drug endangered.

There are over 20 child advocacy centers (CACs) across the state, providing specialized, local services in every county in Oregon. Together, we form Oregon Child Abuse Solutions—the entity I am testifying on behalf of today. In all, we are requesting \$16.6M in APRA funding. Our request is statewide, and is based on one-time funding needs—building renovations, telemedicine equipment and technology, and a small request to backfill federal cuts for staffing. These funds will increase access to these critical services at a time where we know the need is high—a need we are not currently meeting. You can find more information about this request including a breakdown of specific needs by center in the written record.

At my CAC, we are asking for \$600,000 to fund an expansion of our facility, which would allow KIDS Center to serve more children and families in need of our services.

As you know, CACs receive inadequate funding from the state (only 18% of operating costs) to provide statutorily mandated services like forensic interviews and child abuse medical exams. We provide these services in collaboration with law enforcement, DHS, schools, prosecutors and other Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) partners. However, issues caused by chronic underfunding, such as long wait lists and inability to see all kids who are referred for services, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as CACs report that it is more expensive to provide care, and that cases seen are much more severe.

Due to current inadequate funding levels and high immediate needs, most CACs are unable to make long-term investments that will expand services to meet existing and future needs of growing communities, such as the purchase of new buildings or expansion of existing buildings. Due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the work done by CACs, waiting rooms are private and CACs must limit the number of families seen at one time—this was the case even prior to the pandemic. We are not like normal non-profits which may be able to serve 50 families all at once. One time funding for new or expanded buildings will allow for more children to be served simultaneously, which will decrease waitlists and increase access—a total game changer for the communities we serve. Today, CACs are only able to serve approximately 55% of the children referred to them, due largely to inadequate funding/space. Granting this funding request will have a significant impact in increasing access to services.

The response that a child receives from their community after disclosure of abuse has the ability to impact their trajectory for the rest of their lives. We know that granting this one-time funding request will make a significant impact for children and families who have experienced abuse across the great state of Oregon.

In closing, I'd like to thank the several legislators who included this request in their APRA funding. We are so thankful that the collective need of CACs in Oregon has been included in this discussion.

Sincerely,

Gil Levy  
Executive Director  
KIDS Center

\*Serving Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson counties primarily, and providing complex case consultation, training and technical assistance to Harney, Sherman and Wheeler counties\*