



February 9, 2021

Chair Williams  
Vice Chair Leif  
Vice Chair Ruiz

House Committee on Human Services, Members:

My name is Kevin Dowling. I serve as the Executive Director of CARES Northwest. In our 33-year history, we have cared for over 41,000 children primarily from Multnomah and Washington Counties. Many of these children are survivors of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. At CARES Northwest, we identify when child abuse has happened, and intervene to keep children safe and start them on the path toward healing.

I am requesting your support of HB 2826 to increase funding of Oregon's 20 Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) by \$6 million for the biennium.

HB 2826 would support the critical role Oregon's CACs have in protecting children. Oregon's CACs serve almost 8,000 children each year. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, child abuse impacts an estimated 120,000 Oregon children every year.

On average, state investment makes up only 17% of CAC budgets, even though CAC services are mandated by Karly's law and, prior to the pandemic, the need was growing. We worry, with families experiencing increased stressors and isolation this past year, the need for CAC services will be greater than ever, once restrictions related to the pandemic decrease and schools re-open.

CACs serve all children regardless of ability to pay, but the current level of state support means many children endure long waitlists for services. Worse, children might not be seen by a CAC at all. Instead, they may be interviewed in police stations or emergency rooms by staff with no specialized training to assess children for child abuse, and without the team of multidisciplinary experts working together—which is a cornerstone of the CAC approach. At CARES Northwest, increased funding from HB 2826 would enhance access to care to better meet the growing needs of children in Washington and Multnomah Counties.

Passing HB 2826 will make a huge difference in the lives of all Oregon's children. It will move us closer to an Oregon where all children have access to a team of experts who are dedicated to supporting children, stopping abuse and beginning the process of healing.

Sincerely,

Kevin Dowling, Executive Director, CARES Northwest

