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May 6, 2021

Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

RE: Support for HB 3182 A

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson, 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.

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.

The youth leaders of OFYC youth have elevated the need to reduce bias in child welfare decisions as their 2021 Session priority and HB 3182 A is a way to accomplish just that. This is an opportunity to hear and support the voice and priorities of Native families. HB 3182 A will finalize and strengthen the Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act which was passed in the first special session of 2020 (HB 4214). HB 3182 A will provide some important fixes and it will put best practices for adoptions into Oregon's adoption laws, and it will recognize customary adoptions that align with traditional tribal practices and the importance of tribal families.

While preparing for the OFYC 2020 Policy Conference this past August, youth on the planning team started to learn about racial disproportionality in child welfare. They were shocked to learn that Native children are disproportionately represented in foster care and at higher rates than other child groups in Oregon. While there is federal legislation intended to address this, there is clearly more work to be done.

Thank you for reading my testimony. OFYC urges you to support the priority of Native families through HB 3182 A.

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