

**Public Testimony on the Public Defense Services Commission/OPDS Biennial Budget
May 10, 2021**

Co-Chair Gorsek, Co-Chair Sollman and members of the Committee,

My name is Dana Brandon and I am the Case Manager Administrator for the Parent Child Representation Program. In this contracted role I support Oregon's Office of Public Defense Services in recruiting, training and providing technical assistance to PCRP attorneys and case managers. I have been in this position since PCRP was implemented in Oregon in 2014.

I have devoted my career to public defense working as a defense investigator for many years and then pursuing my Master of Social Work degree where I was introduced to the idea of multidisciplinary legal representation. I have had the privilege of working with indigent clients for over 20 years and witnessing the heroic efforts of parents and children involved in Oregon's juvenile justice systems. For most of my career, I worked with attorneys that carried too many cases and did not have sufficient support and training to address clients' barriers and collateral needs. Under the PCRP model, we have attorneys with more manageable caseloads, enhanced training along with access to case managers who provide a social work perspective to the case and are skilled in client engagement. We have seen incredible outcomes - we see parents and children with hope, resilience, and perseverance when they feel supported by a strong, multidisciplinary defense team.

I applaud Oregon's legislature for supporting and funding the Parent Children Representation Program. It is an evidence-based model that we see expanding all over our nation. We know this model of legal representation improves outcomes and we are gathering data that shows just that. OPDS's PCRP staff have developed and effectively implemented this program in 10 counties in Oregon. Over the years I have seen OPDS support the improvement of practice in the following ways. **OPDS' commitment to instituting highly skilled PCRP leadership** has been instrumental in PCRP's success. PCRP's Program Manager and Contract Analyst are my main points of contact and provide valuable collaborative support in identifying and addressing systemic barriers. OPDS has provided **enhanced training and support** including webinars and resources for PCRP providers. The recently developed Juvenile Provider Toolkit includes appellate updates, motion templates and relevant literature to improve legal advocacy. A delinquency practice specialist was also added to the PCRP team to provide guidance in this unique type of representation. These resources are critical to this work and allow for attorneys to provide enhanced, quality legal representation. OPDS also added a dedicated data analyst to the PCRP team which has resulted in **improved data collection and reporting guidelines**. Because of this resource, we can demonstrate outcomes like a reduction in time spent in foster care and shortened time to permanency. To refine best practices under this model, PCRP leadership is implementing a **PCRP Advisory Group** comprised of case managers, trial attorneys and administrators to better inform OPDS' PCRP/juvenile practice contracting, oversight and support. These enhancements to the PCRP program have been critical as we have grown from a couple of pilot counties to nearly 150 PCRP contract providers in ten jurisdictions.

Our clients must navigate oppressive systems, most have traumatic backgrounds, are living in poverty and have distrust of DHS and other systems they must interact with. The Parent Child Representation Program provides clients with team representation where case managers, attorneys and clients are working collaboratively to identify needs and seek creative and trauma-informed approaches to address those needs. It has been incredible to observe the results of this team approach to client advocacy. We see removals prevented - babies born who are able to go home from the hospital with their birth

parents because of effective safety planning done by the defense team. We see families reunited sooner because housing has been secured. We see clients able to physically hold and kiss their infant children after months of halted visitation due to COVID-19. We see attorneys making better informed arguments in court to get cases dismissed. We hear clients tell us they felt heard for the first time and had a voice at the table. We see clients empowered to engage in their case plan and address their substance abuse issues so their children can come home. We see youth who are able to remain out of detention because their defense team supports them in abiding by their release agreements. I could go on and on about the profound outcomes I have witnessed since this program was implemented.

It is my hope that Oregon's legislature will **support sustained funding** for OPDS' Parent Children Representation Program so that we can continue to provide enhanced training and support to the providers committed to this important work. We need to see **continued PCRCP expansion** across the state pursuant to the task force recommendations and **sufficient OPDS infrastructure** to oversee the PCRCP and maintain program fidelity. Oregon needs to continue to be at the forefront of providing quality, interdisciplinary legal representation for Oregon's most vulnerable populations.

I want to thank you for your time and commitment to funding quality public defense services. I look forward to continued collaborative work to improve outcomes for those involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.



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