

Dear Esteemed Committee Members,

I am writing you today to advocate for an investment into Public Safety for our community, and improved outcomes for young people in the custody of the Oregon Youth Authority. I am writing you today as the Executive Director of Youth Progress. And I am writing to you today as member of the Oregon Alliance for Children, Families, and Communities. Please include POPs #107 (SOT) and #115 (OWI) in your recommended 21-23 budget plan for OYA.

As the Executive Director of Youth Progress, a nonprofit organization, licensed in the state of Oregon as a Child Caring Agency to provide proctor foster care for all genders ages 13 to 25 years. Youth Progress contracts with the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) to provide Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS) in Portland, I have seen first hand the impacts of the current BRS rate model, and how rates of reimbursement have not kept up with cost of living and cost of staffing in Portland. When I arrived at Youth Progress 4 years ago, we were paying our direct line staff \$32k-\$36k per year and as the BRS rates have increased we have been able to increase our wages up to \$40-\$42k per year for bachelors level staff. These staff are incredible, and amazing with the young people, and yet they are inexperienced and struggling to cover their bills, and often early in their career and looking for opportunities for advancement through a graduate degree or in another sector. At the same time, we have also increased rates of reimbursement for proctor foster parents from on average \$42 dollars per day to \$65 per day, so as to be able to effectively recruit and retain highly skilled proctor foster parents. this has worked, and this year alone we have certified 16 new foster homes across DHS and OYA services. In order to invest in a support team to support Proctor Foster parents, I have successfully fundraised 10% or more of our budget to cover these additional costs.

Youth Progress (YP) historically provided residential care to young people in OYA's custody. We operated 2 homes. 1 was Sex offense specific treatment work (SOT) to young people in OYA's care. Through the BRS funding model, staffing challenges, and a decision to focus in our our greatest value add to the community (recruiting, certifying, training and supporting Proctor Foster Parents, and providing associated services and supports), we have closed both the 2 residential homes over the last 3 years. A key part of the decision to close the home providing SOT services was that we were unable to secure a long term arrangement with a Certified Clinical Sex offender therapist (CCSOT). The specialists we engaged with each worked with us for about 1 year and then decided there funding was sufficient.

At Youth Progress we believe that young people in the juvenile justice and foster care systems are leaders, scholars, artists, athletes and entrepreneurs. As a state, as a system, and as a community we need to invest into the success of young people in our programs. We have the resources and we just need the political will to say that just good enough is not good enough any more. We know what happens if we do not invest. Please invest in what works at a level that works. This is an equity issue & a racial equity issue. Oh, and one last plea for help; we need urgency. Please invest in the safety and well-being of our states most vulnerable and/or highest risk youth so that they can actualize their potential as leaders, scholars, artists, athletes and entrepreneurs.

"I am a product of the love and care of YP, I will be retiring from a great job and will enjoy traveling and new experiences, I have traveled around the world and lived in South Korea. These are things I would have never experienced if it were not for Youth Progress showing me a brighter path to follow."- YP Grad

Thank you in advance.
Nick Gallo, MSW