

Catholic Community Services

*We champion the positive development of children and adults,
strengthen families and build community.*

Dear Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and members of the House Committee on Human Services,

My name is Lori Simpson and I have worked for Catholic Community Services (CCS) of Salem for over 21 years. CCS was established in 1938, has been nationally accredited since 1998 and has been an Independent Living program (ILP) provider agency for 36 continuous years.

CCS is submitting this testimony in support of HB 2340.

As a long-standing provider of ILP services to current and former foster youth, we urge the committee to see and fulfill the need for adequate funding to serve the many vulnerable teens and young adults who have come through the foster care system in Oregon. The CCS ILP contract with the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) has allowed us to serve up to 110 young people per month continuously since 1985. Along with teaching basic life skills to our youth, ILP is instrumental in coaching our young people to:

- navigate housing resources and obstacles,
- obtain educational opportunities,
- secure basic transportation,
- achieve living-wage employment,
- overcome adversity such as during the pandemic and wildfires,
- access mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness,
- develop healthy relationships and natural community supports.

Each youth is unique, and their needs are unique as well. ILP serves youth from various backgrounds, including a significant number from communities of color. Though they come from different cultures and upbringing, they all share the common thread of experiencing foster care first-hand. HB 2340 would stabilize provider rates and critical staffing, which is a lifeline for these youth. ILP staff must hold reasonable caseload levels, and be nimble and equipped to address the unique and diverse needs of transition-age foster youth. At CCS, as well as throughout the State of Oregon, ILP providers are passionate about our responsibilities to current and former foster youth.

There is a gap between what is being provided by ILP and what current and former foster youth report they need. First, there are former foster youth who are



no longer eligible for ILP services simply because they have reached age 21. We believe wholeheartedly that losing ILP service at this critical juncture sets the course for poor outcomes with lifelong consequences. Additionally, foster youth may or may not have had life-skills training to be able to navigate the obstacles that they may encounter as young adults. ILP is instrumental in advising, guiding, supporting, and educating our young people about how to make their way in the world. Cooking/meal planning, banking/debt/credit, resource navigation, guidance to find healthcare providers and staying afloat emotionally and financially are all skills that ILP provides to every youth we serve. We recognize transition-age foster youth continue to be an underserved population in the current system, largely due to the state funding investment not matching the need. Caseloads are at an all-time high with 40+ youth to one case manager, far exceeding best practice for youth-centered services. It is difficult to expect relationships to be built and outcomes to be strong at these caseload levels. We urge the State of Oregon to provide Oregon foster youth with what they need to break the cycle of abuse, neglect and homelessness and live their best lives.

In closing, HB 2340 will provide the funding needed to stabilize the Oregon ILP program and provide for the specific needs of each ILP youth. But really, it is not just about funding ILP providers, but rather, allowing ILP to guide current and former foster youth to have enriched, successful relationships and fulfilling experiences in their lives. We ask for your consideration of HB 2340 and for your investment in current and former foster youth. Thank you for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,

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