

NEW **AVENUES** *for Youth*

March 1, 2021

Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Leif and Ruiz, Members of the Committee

RE: House Bill 2340

My name is Sean Suib, I reside in Multnomah County, and I am the Executive Director of New Avenues for Youth. New Avenues for Youth is a non-profit that operates in the Tri-County area, and is dedicated to the prevention and intervention of youth homelessness.

I have been at New Avenues since it's founding in 1997, and have unique experience to share regarding why HB 2340 is so critical. New Avenues started as a late stage intervention for young people already experiencing homelessness and living on the street. Pretty quickly a hard truth emerged, that there is an undeniable link between aging out of foster care and long-term adult homelessness.

The DHS funded Independent Living Program (ILP) is the only significant resource dedicated to preparing youth for self-sufficiency, and hence, it is the best line of defense in preventing youth homelessness as an outcome of foster care. Further, foster care disproportionately impacts BIPOC youth and families as well as youth who identify as LGBTQIA2SP+. Sadly, this inequity continues to result in overrepresentation of these groups in those who experience adult homelessness.

Since 2014 New Avenues has served as the largest ILP provider in the State, serving over 200 youth every month (50% of the foster youth we serve identify as BIPOC, 10% are undocumented immigrants). For years, legislators have heard statewide from ILP providers that these resources are terribly underfunded and that they are not adequately meeting youth needs. As non-profits have tried to raise private funds to bulk up ILP services, they have faced greater difficulty. A number of those providers are no longer able to serve, and those that still can have needed to make significant cuts to keep services open.

It is not only providers raising the alarm. Over the past two legislative sessions the youth themselves, through Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC), have made passionate pleas to stabilize and increase the resources for transition. These youth have identified the relationship and skill supports they receive from ILP as critical to their transition success.

A year ago, there was a legislative request to stabilize the current ILP system and the legislature failed to act. Since then, there has been a pandemic. The work of supporting youth aging out of foster care went from critical to crisis. In addition to providing skills training, case management, and mentoring, ILP workers are now supporting access to vital resources like economic stimulus funds, food stamps, and unemployment benefits. Further, as our economy slowly recovers, youth will need more help reentering the workforce, and finding and retaining affordable housing.

Now, more than ever, HB 2340 is a moral imperative. Without additional resources, increased numbers of youth will fall out of foster care and into homelessness. These youth did not choose to be in a system

of care, and they have been given little say in how they successfully get out. Please listen to their repeated ask to stabilize and fortify this important support.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Suib". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sean" and last name "Suib" clearly distinguishable.

Sean Suib, MSW
Executive Director
New Avenues for Youth