



3/1/2021

Re: HB2424

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

I urge you to support of House Bill 2424 - The Child Safety and Workforce Improvement Act. Jackson Street promotes safety, stability, and well-being to youth ages 10 – 24. We work to prevent homelessness by showing a path to long-term success through building positive relationships and skills for self-sufficiency.

The majority of homeless youth have either run away, been kicked out of unstable home environments, abandoned by their families or caregivers, **involved with public systems - foster care, juvenile justice, and mental health** - or have a history of residential instability and disconnection. For some youth, family instability leads to involvement with child welfare. Youth involved with the criminal justice system are more likely to report unstable housing, AND homeless youth report a high level of involvement with the criminal justice system. Homeless youth are often victims of commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking. Youth who exit either juvenile detention or foster care may later become homeless due to the fact that few have acquired the skills or ability to earn the income needed to live on their own.

Our staff work hard every day for youth to keep this from happening. Our organization values these employees and offers the best work culture we can. We've made the list of the top 100 nonprofits to work for in Oregon for the last two years. We have been working to increase pay, benefits, and self-care support. We added an EPA this year with COVID funds. But our starting pay is still too low, currently \$13 an hour for recent college graduates with college loans. We have health benefits, holiday and PTO but not dental or retirement. We want to attract a diverse and highly qualified workforce but have difficulty recruiting competitively.

To improve safety and support more positive outcomes for children and youth, we must invest and diversify our community-based workforce. Specifically, the Child Safety and Workforce Improvement Act will invest:

- \$1.25M per biennium in training funds to improve child/youth safety, treatment outcomes, regulatory compliance, and improve the retention and recruitment of a well-trained, highly qualified provider workforce.
- \$2.5M per biennium to support the recruitment and retention of staff of color.
- \$250K per biennium for student loan forgiveness focusing on QMHA's or social service designated staff.
- \$250K per biennium to begin an apprentice program for QMHAs/Ps, initial start-up costs for 25 apprentices.

Thank you for your continued commitment to youth and families in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ann P. Craig".

Ann P. Craig, Executive Director