

Chair Williams, Vice-Chair Leif, Vice-Chair Ruiz, my name is Hannah Royal and I live in Salem, OR (house district 21, senate district 11). I am currently 24 years old and teach high school biology at a high school in Salem. I am also a member of the advisory committee and legislative action team for Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) and spent time in foster care from the ages of 14-21. I was in Independent Living Programs (ILP) in both Douglas and Benton counties during this time.

I am writing this testimony to voice my support for HB 2340: Expanding Transition Services for Foster Youth. The legislative concept for this bill was created originally from OFYC youth, and has now evolved into the current ask. In 2019, we were disappointed that SB 745 was not funded when the Legislature failed to act on a funding recommendation to stabilize ILP providers.

Oregon ILP gives youth the opportunity to have a greater chance of being more successful when they transition out of care. Through ILP, foster youth receive support from an ILP worker, or "coach," while learning a range of skills including completing high school, creating a resume, cooking and caring for themselves, getting a driver's license or state ID, renting their first apartment, budgeting for expenses, and filling out financial aid forms. ILP also gives youth the opportunity to establish supportive relationships with adults and build community with other youth who share the unique experience of transitioning out of care. When I was in ILP, I was able to receive help preparing for college, paying for a deposit and items like furniture and appliances for my first rental, budgeting for various expenses during college, and navigating relationships with roommates. My ILP workers helped me with so much when I was transitioning out of foster care and I can't imagine what I would have done had I not had their help.

In the federal fiscal year of 2016, 2,205 youth in care (21% of Oregon's foster care population) were 14 years of age or older. Just under half of eligible youth received ILP services in both 2017 and 2018. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) data tells us that in the federal fiscal year of 2018, one-third (32%) of the 21 year olds who had been in care in Oregon at age 17 reported being homeless in the previous two years. These are youth who are eligible for ILP services. I worry these youth were not offered ILP services due to lack of funding or staff. No youth is required to participate in Independent Living Programs, but they seek these services because they know it helps them become successful adults.

HB 2340 asks for additional for transition services for foster youth through Oregon's ILP. If passed, ILP providers will be stabilized so they continue their important work. This investment will result in more "coaches," create smaller caseloads, and serve more youth in the ILP program statewide.

I am asking on behalf of foster youth in Oregon that you support this bill. I am giving back to my community by teaching as a high school biology teacher, and I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without the help of ILP. I am still connected to my ILP workers. They have been there for me both when I graduated high school and graduated college. My ILP workers were even invited to my wedding. I have such a strong support network due to the efforts of my ILP workers and I feel more confident in myself and my abilities due to ILP. By supporting this bill, you are supporting youth like me to have a better chance at a promising future.