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January 31, 2023

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallen, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Gil Levy (he/him/his) and I serve as the Executive Director of KIDS Center, the children’s advocacy center serving Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson Counties, and providing regional services to Harney, Sherman, and Wheeler Counties. In our 28-year history, we have cared for over 10,500 children from across our region of Oregon. Many of these children are survivors of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. At KIDS Center, we identify when child abuse has happened, work closely with our community partners in law enforcement, child welfare, and the criminal justice system so they can intervene to keep children safe, and we provide trauma-informed therapeutic services to start survivors of abuse on the path toward healing. KIDS Center also provides a robust menu of abuse prevention trainings for children and adults across Central Oregon which have helped thousands of community members learn how to recognize the risks, the signs, and the steps to take to help prevent abuse from occurring.

I am requesting your support of HB 2732 to maintain the increased investment of \$6M in Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) that was initially made during the 2021 legislative session. CACs have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding to enhance our sustainability as nonprofit organizations that are responsible for providing statutorily required services. Our network of CACs is deeply appreciative that our \$6M funding request was included in the Christmas Tree bill last session. As you know, the Christmas Tree bill was created as a one-time funding allocation, yet our centers collectively need sustained state funding to support the highly specialized staff positions which are necessary to provide these services. In fact, nearly every CAC in the state reported using the 2021 funding for increased staff positions or increased hours for existing staff.

For example, KIDS Center used the 2021 funding to help pay for professional staff in the areas of Intake, Forensic Interviewing, and Multidisciplinary Team support and coordination, all of which are critical positions that ensure our CAC functions as it should. These funds contributed greatly to our successful effort to reduce average wait times for an evaluation appointment by one week. We also used a portion of the funds to replace aging audio/visual equipment used for observing and recording forensic interviews. CACs record forensic interviews to create an accurate record of each interview, and these recordings may be used by our District Attorney’s office as evidence in court when criminal charges are filed against an alleged abuser.

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CACs serve all Oregon children regardless of their family's ability to pay, but the current level of state support means many children endure long waitlists for services. Worse, children might not be seen by a CAC at all. Instead, they may be interviewed in police stations or emergency rooms by staff with no specialized training to assess children for child abuse, and without the team of multidisciplinary experts working together— which is a cornerstone of the CAC approach.

Passing HB 2732 will move us closer to an Oregon where all children have access to an intentionally designed team of experts who are dedicated to supporting them, stopping abuse and beginning the process of healing. Please hold the progress you made to protect kids and continue the \$6M investment in CACs.

Sincerely,



Gil Levy
Executive Director
KIDS Center