



January 31, 2023

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

Re: HB 2732

Children's Center in Clackamas County is an organization created to assist our community in responding to child abuse. Children's Center's mission is end child abuse and neglect through assessment, treatment, and prevention. The primary goal of Children's Center is to ensure that children (birth to 18 years of age) suspected to be victims of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and/or domestic violence are provided with quality evaluative and support services in a child-friendly setting.

Children's Center urges support for HB 2732 maintaining the 2021 investment of \$6M in Children's Advocacy Centers. Children's Advocacy Centers have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding, and we are really thankful that our \$6M funding request was included in the Christmas Tree bill last session. As you know, the Christmas Tree bill is just one-time funding, and CACs continually report that their greatest need is highly specialized staff. In fact, nearly every CAC reported using the 2021 funding for increased staff, or increased hours for existing staff.

For example, one Center used the funding to hire a bilingual therapist- a longstanding need for that community. Additional uses include purchase of new medical equipment, and facility repairs or expansions so that more kids can be seen. At Children's Center, we expanded our assessment team to include additional medical providers, family support specialists, and forensic interviewers so that we could increase the number of children we serve and offer more urgent appointments for children who are referred under Karly's Law (requiring an assessment in under 48 hours).

Most often, Centers receive referrals from law enforcement or ODHS. By providing specialized child abuse expertise, Centers are a necessary resource for ODHS caseworkers and law enforcement officers. Highly specialized medical providers at Centers serve to "rule in" or "rule out" child abuse, and forensic interviewers are trained to ask neutral, non-leading, legally sound, and developmentally-appropriate questions.

When children cannot access a Center, the likelihood of misdiagnoses is higher, which can result in children remaining in unsafe situations or children being removed from their homes unnecessarily. When children don't have access, they may also experience more trauma, due to receiving service in police stations and emergency rooms, rather than a child-friendly setting designed specifically for them.





Children's Center

A place where healing begins

In recent years, the Legislature has made great strides in improving Oregon's child welfare system—but, we must acknowledge that the success of ODHS caseworkers is not possible without strong community partners providing them with the tools and expertise they need to be successful—including Centers.

We want to hold the progress the Legislature made to protect kids served by Children's Advocacy Centers, and keep much needed new staff in place. This is why we are respectfully requesting \$6M during the 2023 Legislative Session.

Warm Regards,

Karen Rush, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Kristin Eaton, J.D.
Board Chair

