



February 2, 2023

TO: House Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda
RE: Support for HB 2732

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Andersen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and Member of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon (OCO) is a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families.

According to OCO's KIDS COUNT data cards, over 11,600 children were victims of abuse/neglect in 2020.¹ This is most likely an undercount due to the closure of schools and other institutions during the pandemic where abuse and neglect are often reported. In fact, there are findings suggesting that the economic and psychological tolls of the ongoing pandemic have exacerbated domestic violence and abuse prevalence.

We support HB 2732 to continue critical funding for Child Advocacy Centers (CAC). CACs provide essential services by providing child abuse medical exams, forensic interviews, therapy, and additional family support services when child abuse is suspected or confirmed. Currently, Oregon maintains 24 advocacy centers that serve all 36 counties. CACs also work closely in collaboration with law enforcement, DHS, district attorneys, schools, and other community partners during child abuse assessments and investigations, which is both cost-effective and demonstrates a model that has shown improved outcomes for children. When a child or youth cannot access a CAC, the likelihood of misdiagnoses is higher, which can result in the youth remaining in unsafe situations or being unnecessarily separated from their family and home.

Children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect deserve to have access to highly-skilled staff who are able to provide evidence-based, trauma-informed healing services. HB 2732 will ensure the continued investment of \$6 million for CACs. This funding was essential in 2021 for CACs to maintain staff, or even add more, and expand their services. Without this key funding,

¹ <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

CACs will struggle to meet the needs of children and families, leading to a lack of staffing, lack of access to their vital services, and long wait times for life-saving exams and interviews. By continuing the investment of Children Advocacy Centers across Oregon, we can ensure that children and families are accessing and receiving the much vital care and services they need.

We thank you for your time and efforts to improve child well-being across the state. We urge your support of HB 2732.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

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Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

View the 2023 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda