



January 31, 2023

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

My name is Jackalene Antunes. I serve as the Executive Director of Wally's House - Curry Child Abuse Intervention Center. In during the last nine years, in my role as our county's Coordinator, Director & Interviewer under the District Attorney's Office and now the Executive Director of our nonprofit center, we have cared for over 1000 children. Many of these children are survivors of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. At Wally's House we identify when child abuse has happened, and intervene to keep children safe and start them on the path toward healing.

I am requesting your support of HB 2732 to maintain the increased investment of \$6M in Children's Advocacy Centers made during the 2021 legislative session. 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 was created as a one-time funding allocation, 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 included purchases of new medical equipment and facility repairs or expansions so that more kids could be seen. Wally's House used the funds to launch a Child and Family Therapist position and beef up our internet and IT security. Our county, like many in our state and country, has had difficulty meeting the needs of our mentally ill, much less meet the needs of our traumatized children. By creating a position in-house, we save our clients and their families the excruciating waits for an assessment and then services to deal with the abuse they suffered, and the trauma and stress they are experiencing.

CACs serve all 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.

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Our Mission: To provide compassionate intervention, assessment, and advocacy for victims and their families, while supporting a child-focused, community-based system of prevention and healing.

Passing HB 2732 will move us closer to an Oregon where all children have access to a 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,

Jackalene J. Antunes
Executive Director