



February 15, 2023

Chairs Campos and Valderama,
Members of the Human Services Sub Committee of Ways & Means,

My name is Marissa Cade and I am a former foster parent to a high acuity special needs kiddo, and an ongoing chosen mom to that same young woman. I am a God mom, step mom, and now, a bio-mom as well. I also have the honor of serving as the facilitator of the Foster Homes of Healing Coalition for our fifth year of advocacy. Foster Homes of Healing is a coalition of organizations that serve foster youth and their families every day. Our primary purpose is to elevate the quality of foster care in Oregon through legislative action.

Since 2012 when I first became a foster parent, the Legislature has renewed and improved its support of many elements of child foster care. DHS Child Welfare now provides world-class training and support for resource foster parents through the KEEP program. They have begun to expand capacity for enhanced care for high acuity youth and children through investments in Treatment Foster Care Oregon and in-home intensive behavioral health care, two programs whose capacity are still far from able to serve the huge need. You have also increased access to support for children and families by hiring more caseworkers resulting in lower caseloads for case work staff, and increasing the availability of Court Appointed Special Advocates for kids.

Right now in Oregon there are hundreds of children who still do not have access to a placement that suits their needs, whether that is because of the level of care that child needs or because of the lack of affirming homes with guardians who look like them. The barriers to more families becoming child welfare foster/resource parents are many, but the financial burden may be the most pervasive element that keeps families from opening their home to children who need them. Foster parents are provided with about one third of the average cost to raise a child in the pacific northwest each month. The economic reality is that many wonderful families can not afford to care for additional children without adequate financial support.

The cost of raising children, especially children with more complex needs, is higher than these calculations take into consideration. School age children with behavioral health concerns, traumatic childhoods, and emotionally challenging circumstances need more care throughout the day - even while they are in school. I received calls daily at times to support my child at the intersection of her education and health care needs. In the end, I could only work part time while she was in my care. Many families cannot afford to take a reduction in work hours to care for children with high needs, especially with such a lack of support from the state.

In conclusion, I want to urge you, Chair Campos, Chair Valderama, and members of the committee to consider not only maintaining the current service level for the entire DHS Child Welfare department, but also to enhance the support the state offers foster resource families and children with the \$17M increase recommended by Governor Kotek. Many of these young people face untold hardship and

unfavorable outcomes for many years once they leave the child welfare system, you can help change that. For kids who must be in care, help ensure they are in a foster home of true healing, with all the resources they need to thrive.

Thank you,

Marissa Cade

Facilitator, Foster Homes of Healing

Increased investments in foster care will continue to build on the growing success of Oregon's foster care program.



KEEP
Supporting Foster & Kinship Families



Fostering Success In Families

