

Chair Dexter, Co-Vice Chair Gamba, Co-Vice Chair Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. As the Director of Safe Families for Children in Lincoln County, I am passionate to find our children and youth who are falling through the cracks of our systems and connect them with our vetted volunteer host families and mentors. Safe Families for children is a host home program with the goal to prevent child abuse and connect isolated children and youth with community. I am here today to advocate for full funding for HB 2454 and HB 2456.

Every week I meet youth who are isolated, disconnected from our community and without a stable place to live. Some youth have strong family connections who are just struggling to find stable housing; others have nobody at all to claim them, guide or support them through life. Oregon ranks among the first in the nation for our houseless youth population.

This past year Safe Families for Children provided respite hosting and mentorship to a young girl whose mother was in prison. She was living with a relative, whose house was already full of people, so she lived in a shed outside the home. She got in fights at school, was bullied and was even the bully in some situations. This young teen had never seen a counselor for the trauma she experienced nor had anyone in her life she could share the deepest hurts of her heart too. Safe Families stepped in and connected her with a respite host family and mentor. Despite the chaos in this youth's life, and though there was much she didn't understand or control, there were two things she loved; music and animals. Her mentor would pick her up every week, and take her out to their family farm to help with the animals. She loves horses. Safe families was able to get a local donor to pay for horse Therapy, which has been her favorite weekly activity. Any choir performance this youth had her mentor was always there in the audience cheering her on. We set up camps all throughout the summer and respite overnight breaks to get her out of staying in the shed.. She was able to build relationships with people who loved her unconditionally, whether she had a great day at school, or was a complete meltdown. She had her people she could lean on, cheering her on and encouraging her to be her best self. Safe Families even supported the youths mom while in prison, to help create a plan once released. For almost two years, this teen's mentor connected with her weekly and continued on even after her mother was released. I am so grateful for that day when I received the referral for this teen youth. I share

with you one story today, but there are hundreds more just from Lincoln County, where youth are desperate for support.

HB 2454 and HB 2456 provide \$6.25 M to support host home providers like Safe Families for Children across Oregon, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is considered a leader. Host Homes provide youth with long-term housing support as well as a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school. Every child and young adult deserves to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive.

HB 2454 and 2456 ensure that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing houselessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Marisa Hayner