



March 22, 2023

Testimony provided verbally -

Good Afternoon – for the record, my name is Royce Bowlin and I have the pleasure of working with the Oregon Alliance – our goal at the Alliance is to promote and advocate for system change, creating principles of respect, inclusion, and access to equitable services for our children, youth, families, and the communities we serve across Oregon.

I'm also a trained therapist, have worked in community mental health for close to 3-decades. I'm also a proud father of a 17yo son, who we adopted 7-years ago. I've also been investigated by the state. It was tremendously stressful for myself and my spouse, as well as our son. The investigations were not substantiated.

I'm hear in support of HB3333. What we have now is a one-size-fits-all regulatory framework for child abuse or neglect investigations. This has turned into a persistent culture of fear among staff and foster parents who deliver services in Oregon's Child Welfare, Youth Authority, and mental health sector. Annually, hundreds of staff are investigated, but only a small percentage of them result in a substantiated occurrence of child abuse or neglect.

In 2021, 89% of staff investigated were ultimately cleared of abuse.

Being investigated, along with the assumption of guilt, leads to experienced and caring staff leaving the sector. This unintentional but is the reality for many staff and programs.

We are asking to adopt a framework of Just Culture.

Just Culture is the organizational accountability for the systems they've designed, and employee accountability for the choices they make.

Within this framework, when an adverse event occurs, the focus is what went wrong, not who is the problem. Instead, staff are left feeling that they have done something wrong. By moving away for the existing shame and blame it will improve child safety and fosters a work culture of learning and growth by creating a post-screening process to account for unintentional human errors where there's no to little impact.

It doesn't change the definition of abuse or the screening and investigatory process.



Just Culture has been around for decades. First with the airline industry, and over the past 20 to 30 – years in the healthcare industry.

This legislation will support a work culture of learning and growth—improving the safety and quality of services to children, youth, and their families.

On the ground, this means if an incident is unintentional human error, investigators will have an additional option to establish corrective measures that the individual would be required to accomplish (for example) training, supervision, and other professional development opportunities.

Organizations serving children and youth have been reporting incidents on themselves to the abuse hot line.

Just Culture, also, introduces the idea and tools for determining intention of their actions.

There is evidence to suggest that once health care workers feel comfortable disclosing errors—and once investigations have been conducted to identify how and why they occurred—organizations operating under Just Culture principles have been successful in addressing those errors. For example, surgical checklists have been shown to effectively reduce the number of wrong-site surgical errors.

In the words of one of the country’s most prominent voices on reducing medical errors, Harvard professor Lucian Leape, “Approaches that focus on punishing individuals instead of changing systems provide strong incentives for people to report only those errors they cannot hide. Thus, a punitive approach shuts off the information that is needed to identify faulty systems and create safer ones. In a punitive system, no one learns from their mistakes.”

As additional fields have taken on the task of transitioning to a more Just Culture, the evidence supporting its efficacy has grown substantially. For example, a study from 2019 found that hospital nurses who believed they worked in a just culture environment were more likely to participate in patient safety activities (confirming a patient’s identity, ensuring a safe environment, etc.).⁴ Industry leaders like the Cleveland Clinic have followed Just Culture principles for years, and the American Nursing Association endorsed the concept all the way back in 2010.

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This change will be significant to staff who show up every day I urge you to support HB3333. This is the right thing to do for staff and those they serve.

HB provides resources for training.

Thank you,

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