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To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means
From: Heather Busby, Executive Director

Re: **SB 5506**

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Co-Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, Members of the Committee,

Founded in 1975, Youth, Rights & Justice is Oregon's only nonprofit public defense provider dedicated exclusively to juvenile law. Each year, we provide holistic, client-centered representation to around 1000 children, youth, and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system. Additionally, we provide early defense advocacy to keep families together and educational advocacy so children can attend, graduate, and succeed in school. In 2021, we launched our juvenile expunction clinic.

YRJ urges the Legislature to adequately fund public defense in Oregon, including an expansion of the Parent-Child Representation Program (PCRP) statewide.

In the midst of a public defense crisis in our state, the PCRP program is an example of how investment in a holistic model of public defense, with caseload maximums and additional supports built in, can make a difference in the lives of attorneys, clients, and ultimately, achieve positive, cost-saving outcomes.

YRJ has been a PCRP provider since the program was expanded to Multnomah County in 2020. This program uses a multidisciplinary approach to legal representation to achieve positive outcomes for children and families and decrease the use of foster care and time to permanency for children.

A 2011 study conducted in Washington state found that multidisciplinary representation models, like the PCRP, increased the speed to all types of permanency. When comparing counties in Washington that utilized the multidisciplinary representation program to those that did not, the speed to reunification, adoption, and guardianship were all significantly faster (11%- reunification; 83%- adoption; 102%- guardianship).ⁱ

In Oregon, the PCRCP enables better experiences with the child welfare system using caseload limits for providers, to allow them to spend more time focused on individual cases, as well as additional training and oversight. Our clients also have access to in-house social workers who work alongside attorneys to meet our clients' psychosocial needs and provide support and connection to vital social services. Due to the unique holistic approach of the PCRCP model, our clients often develop a close working relationship with our social workers that allows them to feel more comfortable and leads to better outcomes for families.

Here is an example from one of our PCRCP attorneys of the difference this model makes:

“Our social workers have been instrumental in many of my cases. In one specific case, the social worker not only made sure that the parent had the items they needed to care for the child, but also communicated with family members and other service providers to bridge any gaps. With the help of her hard work, that child was reunited with their parent, and the case was dismissed by the first review hearing.

In another case, the social worker was able to communicate with a family member who did not speak English and get information about the children's history that would not have been available otherwise. He was also able to be a calming influence in hard circumstances and craft creative solutions to any problems that came up.

In yet another case, our client's social worker was able to work together with the parent's PCRCP social worker to secure housing for the family, the only barrier to the children returning home. Together they looked for available homes, viewed them in person, and communicated with property owners to make sure the family could be together as soon as possible.”

The PCRCP model is a sound investment into the future of Oregon's children and families, in the public defense system, and ultimately, child welfare. It has made a profound difference in the practice of juvenile law in Multnomah County and for our agency and its attorneys. We encourage you to approve funding for the expansion of the PCRCP model to all of Oregon's counties.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Heather Busby
Executive Director

ⁱ Courtney, M. E., & Hook, J. L. (2012). Evaluation of the impact of enhanced parental legal representation on the timing of permanency outcomes for children in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 34(7), 1337-1343, <https://partnersforourchildren.org/resources/publications/evaluation-impact-enhanced-parental-legal-representation-timing-permanency>.