



April 14, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Supporting House Bill 2732 - \$6M for Children's Advocacy Centers

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of CARES Northwest, the children's advocacy center serving Multnomah and Washington counties, I write today in support of House Bill 2732, which would continue much-needed funding for children's advocacy centers (CACs) to provide care and treatment for children impacted by abuse and neglect.

I have had the privilege of being the director of an Oregon CAC for more than a decade, first at ABC House in Linn County and now in the Portland area at CARES Northwest. CARES Northwest is the oldest and largest CAC in Oregon and provides child abuse evaluation, therapy and support services for approximately 1,200 children per year in Multnomah and Washington counties.

CACs statewide did incredible things with the funding that the 2021 Legislature previously allocated. At CARES Northwest, we used the funds to expand our Family Support Team to increase outreach to children and their families – because the crisis of abuse does not end after the evaluation appointment. Thanks to these funds, we expanded our team, adding more social workers who are not only fluent in more languages but also more culturally competent thanks to their lived and professional experience. As a result, we provided outreach and culturally responsive support to 21% more families. That's 100 more families than the previous year.

Although I am proud of that statistic, it is what the statistic represents that really matters. Below are just a few of the examples of how our family support team helped families navigate crisis that we would not have been able to do without this funding:

1. Using only a first name, our team tracked down the only mental health provider that our 17-year-old client trusted and was willing to go to counseling with because she remembered her from back in middle school. We found the counselor and then successfully advocated to get her an appointment when the counselor's caseload was full.

2. We helped a Limited English-Speaking father enroll his daughter at a new school away from the suspect because she was too scared to concentrate on her learning. His concerns were not being taken seriously and he was frightened to rock the boat.
3. Our team supported a mom whose anxiety threatened to overwhelm her when her daughter's abuse triggered her own unresolved trauma history, and we got both mom and daughter into counseling. We helped that mom get the tools and supports she needed so she could help her daughter heal.

Thanks to the 2021 funding, members of our Family Support Team did all of that and more. These family support services are life changing. They are not icing on the cake; they are mission critical to families who are going through a nightmare.

They are also one of the many in the constellation of services CARES Northwest and other CACs provide that do not have sustainable funding so we must bridge the gap with other sources of support.

For every minute CACs spend grant writing, chasing down donors or planning events, we could be caring for more children. Critical services like child abuse evaluations, trauma therapy and family support should not need to be funded by collecting cans or bake sales.

The 2021 investment allowed our CACs to do incredible things for our communities. Children and their families deserve to have these services consistently available to them. On behalf of our team at CARES Northwest, I am asking you not to go backwards, and to support House Bill 2732 which will continue that level of funding, so that we can maintain the services we are providing in our community today.

Thank you for your kind consideration. Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any additional questions at (503) 276-9000.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Gilmore-Robinson', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jenny Gilmore-Robinson, JD
Executive Director, CARES Northwest