

April 26, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair  
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair  
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Re: HB 2732

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

As the Board Chair of KIDS Center in Bend, I am writing to request your support of HB 2732 to maintain the increased investment of \$6M in Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) that was initially made during the 2021 legislative session.

KIDS Center is the CAC serving Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson, Harney, Sherman, and Wheeler Counties, and providing regional consulting services to those counties and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs. In our 28-year history, we have cared for more than 10,500 children from across our region of Oregon. Many of these children are survivors of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect. At KIDS Center, we identify when child abuse has occurred, work closely with our community partners in law enforcement, child welfare, and the criminal justice system so they can intervene to keep children safe, and we provide trauma-informed therapeutic services to start survivors of abuse on the path toward healing. KIDS Center also provides a robust array of abuse prevention trainings for children and adults across Central Oregon, helping thousands of community members learn how to recognize the risks, the warning signs, and the steps to take to help prevent abuse from occurring.

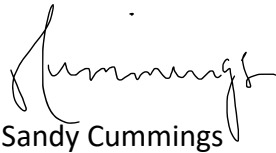
CACs have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding to enhance our sustainability as nonprofit organizations that are responsible for providing statutorily required services. Our network of CACs is deeply appreciative that our \$6M funding request was included in the Christmas Tree bill last session. As you know, the Christmas Tree bill was created as a one-time funding allocation, yet our centers need sustained state funding to support the highly specialized professional staff positions which are necessary to provide these services. In fact, nearly every CAC in the state reported using the 2021 funding for adding direct service staff positions or increasing the hours for existing staff to enhance our capacity to provide these evaluation and treatment services for children who have experienced abuse. These important investments in CAC professional staff directly enhance public safety across the state. For example, KIDS Center used the 2021 funding to help pay for professional staff in the areas of Intake, Forensic Interviewing, and Multidisciplinary Team support and coordination, all of which are critical positions that ensure our CAC functions as it should. These funds enabled our center to achieve a reduction in the average wait time for an evaluation appointment by one week. We

also used a portion of the funds to replace and upgrade aging audio/visual equipment used for observing and recording forensic interviews. CACs record forensic interviews to create a accurate record of each interview, and these recordings are used by District Attorneys as crucial evidence in court proceedings when criminal charges are filed against an alleged abuser.

CACs serve all Oregon children regardless of their family's ability to pay, but the current level of state support means many children endure long waitlists for services. Worse, children might not be seen by a CAC at all. Instead, they may be interviewed in police stations or emergency rooms by staff with no specialized training to assess children for child abuse, and without the team of multidisciplinary experts working together – which is a cornerstone of the CAC approach and is unequivocally recognized as a best practice in addressing child abuse.

Your support of HB 2732 will move us closer to an Oregon where all children have access to an intentionally designed team of experts who are dedicated to supporting them, stopping abuse, and beginning the process of healing. The need that CACs are working so hard to meet is a truly critical one and the investment in this work through your support of HB 2732 will make a tremendous impact for children, families, and communities across this great state of Oregon. Please hold the progress the Legislature made to protect kids and continue the \$6M investment in CACs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandy Cummings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "C".

Sandy Cummings  
Board Chair  
KIDS Center