

April 28, 2023

To: Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members of the Ways and Means Committee

Re: HB 2732

I'm a Board Member for Kids FIRST, Lane County's Children's Advocacy Center. Kids FIRST's mission is to provide intervention and advocacy for children who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime, forensic child abuse evaluations and support for children and their families who may have been impacted by abuse or neglect. The primary goal of Kids FIRST is to ensure that children (birth to 18 years of age) suspected to be victims of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and/or domestic violence are provided with quality evaluative and healing support services in a child-focused setting.

I urge your support for HB 2732, maintaining the 2021 investment of \$6M in Children's Advocacy Centers. Children's Advocacy Centers have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding for these statutorily mandated services, and we are incredibly thankful that our \$6M funding request was included in the Christmas Tree bill last session.

At Kids FIRST, we used this funding to hire a second full time medical provider and a bilingual/bicultural forensic interviewer. This investment increased capacity and reduced wait times for urgent assessments; we're now able to assess children within 48 business hours of an urgent referral, with most children being seen same day. The addition of a second medical provider allowed Kids FIRST to DOUBLE the number of medical assessments provided last year, from 194 to 388.

Highly specialized medical providers at Kids FIRST serve to "rule in" or "rule out" child abuse, and forensic interviewers are trained to ask neutral, non-leading, legally sound, and developmentally appropriate questions.

When children cannot be seen by Kids FIRST, the likelihood of misdiagnoses is higher, which can result in children remaining in unsafe situations or children being removed from their homes unnecessarily. When children don't have access, they may also experience more trauma, due to receiving services in police stations and emergency rooms, rather than a child-friendly setting designed specifically for them.

Your investment in Kids FIRST has improved the health and safety of kids impacted by abuse in Lane County, at no cost to the children and families served. For increased access to continue, continued investment is needed. All children in our State deserve to heal from abuse. These services are an investment in our children and ultimately, the health and safety of our communities.

Sincerely,



Molly Wijers
Board Treasurer
Kids FIRST