



Testimony to the Senate Human Services Committee

February 7, 2024

RE: SB 1521 - 6 Amendment

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson and members of the committee, my name is Simon Fulford, I am a resident of Portland and the Executive Director of Parrott Creek Child & Family Services. We are based in Clackamas County and serve hundreds of children and families from across Oregon every year, particularly those who are involved with and/or in the care of the Oregon Department of Human Services Child Welfare Division.

While I registered to testify as neutral on this bill I am 100% in support of the need to require the Oregon Department of Human Services to contract with properly licensed Child Caring Agencies when responding to the needs of children and youth who are being removed from their families and placed in the care and custody of the state. My understanding is that this is the intent of SB 1521. I don't profess to be an expert in legislative language so I hope appropriate legal counsel has drafted and amended this bill to best ensure that requirement is written into law.

Sadly Oregon's Child Welfare system is getting worse, not better, after more than a decade of under-investment, an increasingly burdensome and duplicative regulatory environment and a lack of vision for what we can achieve for, and provide to, some of the most vulnerable children and adolescents in our state. The decisions made by the Oregon Department of Human Services to contract with unlicensed and poorly regulated entities to provide Temporary Lodging services is just one very front-of-mind example. It is also an insult to the dozens of licensed, professional and highly dedicated Child Caring Agencies who work hard every day to care for children and are not offered \$3,000 per day to do so - yet are regulated and audited within an inch of our lives - and incur those additional costs totally uncompensated. Am I correct in saying that Dynamic Life was paid an additional \$1.3M on top of their service contract to go through the licensing process? I can tell you that no one gave us a penny to do the same!

Children in Temporary Lodging - which is a ridiculous euphemism and we should just say what it is: kids being placed in hotels and AirBandBs - should benefit from the same protections, rights and notifications as all other kids in substitute care. Any organization that cares for a child should be subject to investigations of abuse and kids, should always have ready access to their

attorneys and CASAs, and benefit from the foster child bill of rights, restraint and seclusion laws, etc.

Requiring providers of Temporary Lodging services to be licensed child caring agencies is a sensible and equitable way to ensure these children are cared for by well trained and supported professionals and that these services are appropriately regulated to ensure the best level of care possible.

Finally, while not the focus of this bill, I would like to go on record stating that until the State of Oregon adopts capacity-based contract models for the types of intensive, wrap-around services vulnerable and highly traumatized children need, we will not emerge from the Child Welfare crisis we are in. This is a crisis of Oregon's own making. With vision and a commitment to doing things differently and innovatively, we can actually get ourselves out of this crisis. For now, however, I see very little expression of any bold vision.

Thank you for letting me testify before you today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "SIMON FULFORD", with a large, stylized initial "S" at the beginning. The signature is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Simon Fulford
Executive Director