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February 8, 2024

To: Sen. Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Sen. Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Alison Kelley, JD, CEO 
Liberty House

Re: Support for SB 1587

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

Liberty House urges your support for Senate Bill 1587, Liability Protections for Children Advocacy Center (CAC) Professionals. Liberty House is the Children's Advocacy Center serving Marion and Polk Counties, in which an average of 10,500 calls regarding child abuse are made each year to DHS.

SB 1587 would grant long-overdue, common sense liability protections for our CAC professionals. CACs, like Liberty House, provide expertise, stability, and professionalism during child abuse investigations. As part of their job in caring for the needs of the child they have under their care, our specially-trained staffpersons have an important role in collecting and documenting forensic evidence of any maltreatment against the child. Emotions often run high during these cases and when the parties involved are frustrated with the outcome, they commonly lash out by threatening legal action.

When a family receives services at a CAC, they are participating in a child abuse investigation, which is always a very emotional and difficult experience for everyone involved. Because the outcome of such an investigation may include changes in custody and legal guardianship, estrangement within families, and criminal charges, every organization and professional involved with these cases operates in an emotionally charged space.

CACs are required by law to be part of a county's Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). The MDT is tasked with the investigation and response to child abuse; despite that requirement, we are not afforded any of the protections that all of the other mandated partners on the MDT have. Members of MDT include personnel from school districts, law enforcement agencies, District Attorney offices, and even volunteer members of the MDT like Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). All of those partners have some form of liability protection for their roles in a child abuse investigation and response. **CACs have none.**

SB 1587 is similar to laws in 19 other states which have previously enacted limited liability protections. Our statewide organization, Oregon Child Abuse Solutions, has been working with the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association since the 2023 Session to refine and narrow language around this proposed liability protection. SB 1587 reflects that work as well as additional concerns raised by OTLA.

SB 1587 is a common-sense approach which provides narrow but critical protections for CACs. We ask for your support for SB 1587. Thank you.