

# Testimony of Ann Samuelson

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Before the Oregon House Committee on Childhood Development and Human Services

May 20, 2025

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ann Samuelson. I am a grandmother, an intervenor in a prolonged family law case in Washington County lasting almost a decade, and a resident of Clatsop County. Because we are currently involved in both active appellate litigation and a legal malpractice claim related to that family court matter, I will not speak about the specific facts of our case. Instead, I come before you to share concerns that stem from our experience and that mirror what many Oregon families face.

For nine years, we have been entangled in litigation in the Washington County family court. Though all parties — including the child — have lived in Clatsop County for eight of those years, every attempt to transfer jurisdiction to the correct venue was denied. This is just one example of a rigid and retaliatory system that often disregards common sense, community connection, and child well-being.

Worse, we have seen firsthand how substantiated concerns of child abuse and parental addiction are minimized or outright ignored and even stricken from the record. Family courts claim to protect children, but in practice, they often silence them, punish protective caregivers, and prioritize procedural power over truth and safety. Caregivers can and are sanctioned whether financially or ordered to supervised visitation and the costs of supervision when they have no criminal background of any kind. Children can be forced into unsafe contact. And the trauma continues — sometimes for years.

Oregon is not alone in facing these issues, but we are falling behind in addressing them. States like Ohio and Arizona are taking action. Ohio has worked to limit or end qualified immunity for government actors, including judges and child welfare professionals. That proposal is currently on track for the statewide ballot, reflecting public demand for accountability and reform. Arizona has similarly launched oversight efforts that are exposing family court abuse and pushing for change. Arizona is focused on the orders coming out of family courts, the actual “work product” of the court.

The science supports what families have long known. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente, proves that childhood trauma — especially exposure to abuse, neglect, and prolonged instability, it has life-long health effects. Children with high ACE scores are far more likely to develop depression, heart disease, addiction, and other chronic conditions, and to die early. When the court becomes a source of trauma, it violates its purpose and harms children for life. Family courts are creating a generation of

children who will not function in society at their highest level due to trauma facilitated and ordered by family court systems.

That is why I am urging this Committee to support the creation of an Ad Hoc Legislative Committee on Family Court Reform in Oregon.

Such a committee should:

- Examine patterns of judicial conduct and misuse of discretion;
- Review outcomes where trauma was disregarded;
- Evaluate financial sanctions and coercive orders;
- Recommend trauma-informed practices;
- And establish transparent accountability mechanisms for both the courts and related agencies.

The family court system was meant to protect children and resolve conflict. In too many cases, it has become a mechanism of trauma, injustice, and unchecked power. We can do better — and we must.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to safeguarding the future of Oregon's children and families.

Ann Samuelson

80672 Hwy 202

Seaside, OR 97138

503-440-6233

[ann@riseaboverealty.com](mailto:ann@riseaboverealty.com)