

February 12, 2025

**Senate Committee on Human Services**  
**RE: SB729**

Senator Gelser-Blouin and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 729, which seeks to address the critical issue of access to mental health care for children and youth with disabilities. The long-endured practice of effectively rationing care by means of disability unjustly denies a diverse population of children and youth the support they need and perpetuates systemic disparity.

It has been explicitly recognized for at least two decades that children and youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities face significant challenges in obtaining mental health services in Oregon. That the problem persists speaks to a system chronically underfunded and thus unprepared to meet the needs of a vulnerable population. Access includes not only the availability of services but comprises other long known barriers to care such as cultural responsiveness, insurance coverage, care coordination across service silos, geographic inequities, and a workforce adequately prepared to support the specific needs of children with disabilities and their families.

As a family advocate, I have had the privilege of speaking with hundreds of families across the state. Their experiences are heart-wrenching. When children are denied access to essential services, the adverse effects to families can be devastating. Parents and caregivers endure significant stress as they struggle desperately to find care for their children. The lack of support can lead to emotional exhaustion, financial strain, a sense of helplessness, and a breakdown in family dynamics. The consequences for children are dire. Without necessary mental health care, they may face worsening symptoms, a diminished quality of life, and the need for more intensive – more traumatic – services down the line. The often-overlooked hardship and distress that ripples through the entire family is indefensible.

I strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 729 and work towards a mental health care system that is inclusive, equitable, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of all children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Carol Dickey, MBA, MS  
Advocate for the Family Voice