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To: Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
From: Jennifer Stoller, Staff Attorney
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Re: **SB 691**

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee,

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ), an Oregon-based non-profit public defense provider, has been dedicated exclusively to juvenile law for 50 years. Every year, we provide holistic, client-centered representation to hundreds of children, youth, and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system. In addition, we offer early defense advocacy, before the juvenile court becomes involved, to help keep families together and children out of foster care.

YRJ strongly supports Senate Bill 691.

Pregnancy and the birth of a child are pivotal times for parents, marking profound changes. Project Nurture provides crucial support for pregnant and postpartum individuals seeking to end substance use. The combination of prenatal care, substance use disorder treatment, and peer support is essential for helping parents succeed and keeping babies safely with their parents.

Through YRJ's early defense advocacy, we represent pregnant and postpartum individuals in the early stages of their recovery. The nonjudgmental staff at Project Nurture is one of the key reasons our clients feel comfortable accessing prenatal care. Once they begin attending Project Nurture appointments and group therapy, parents can engage in substance use treatment and take the necessary steps to stabilize.

Some parents first learn about Project Nurture at the birth of their children. At this critical time, Project Nurture staff immediately engage parents, offering them information and options for moving forward. They provide a safe, supportive space for parents to make informed decisions for themselves and their children. Many of these parents seek substance use treatment and collaborate with the Department of Human Services to develop a safety plan to keep their baby with them. Project Nurture's role is essential in supporting this process.

Both Project Nurture and Nurture Oregon have proven effective in reducing child welfare involvement, minimizing the trauma of child removal to foster care and saving state funds by decreasing reliance on foster care. McConnell KJ, Kaufman MR, Grunditz JI, et al., *Project Nurture Integrates Care and Services to Improve Outcomes for Opioid-Dependent Mothers and Their Children*, Health Aff (Millwood). 2020 Apr;39(4):595-602.
doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2019.01574, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32250679/>

Substance use has been increasing, and Project Nurture and Nurture Oregon are serving ever-larger numbers of parents. SB 691 would help stabilize and expand this vital program for all Oregonians. Babies and their parents deserve the opportunity to benefit from the support that Project Nurture provides.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.