

SB 691 written and oral testimony basic template:

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RE: Testimony submitted to the Oregon Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health for the hearing of Senate Bill 691

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Good afternoon Senators, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you about the Nurture Programs and their impact. My name is Lola Jones and I am the executive director of a transitional housing program called Samaritan House and I serve as the housing specialist for the Lincoln Nurture Oregon site, in Senator Anderson's district. We work with and advocate for families who are affected by substance use disorder and engaged with child welfare. Today I will share with you my experience working with these parents and families before and after the Nurture Programs.

Samaritan House is part of a team that manages referrals made by child welfare workers. We consider variables like protective capacity, child safety threats and potential solutions to bring children home or keep them home. Before the Nurture Programs were implemented, when a CPS worker presented at the hospital to investigate a report of drug use during pregnancy, there was a very slim chance that the baby would be leaving the hospital with their parent. More likely, there would be a removal of that infant, placement in foster care and what we call the lighter fluid moment. Addiction is a fire, and similar to fire it is responsive to stimulus both positive and negative. The removal of a newborn immediately following birth is equivalent to upending a bottle of lighter fluid over a fire. The grief, the trauma, anger and confusion are overwhelming, all-consuming and ultimately destructive.

Since the introduction of the Nurture Programs in Lincoln County, we have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of removals and placements in foster care of newborns whose parent used drugs during pregnancy. In fact, over the course of our implementation, 91% of these newborns left the hospital with their parent.

When it is apparent that child welfare will be involved, our cohort will share a Family Plan of Care with the Child Welfare Recovery Support Team, the responding CPS worker and hospital staff so that all members of the team supporting the birth of this child are aware of the most current circumstances of the family and can make prudent decisions about managing remaining safety threats. In the most successful of these cases, an assessment may be opened to ensure the longevity of child safety. Perhaps a legal permanency case may be opened to provide oversight over a longer period of

time. But in either of these scenarios: babies stay in-home, avoiding the immense trauma of removal and costly placement in foster care which tax the capacity of foster parents and placement opportunities that we simply DO NOT HAVE.

I am urging you to support SB 961 so that other communities can IMMEDIATELY stop the flow of children away from their families and into foster care. As I give this testimony, there are babies being born in every district of this state. It is not enough to get upstream of the negative outcomes we know are waiting for these newborns separated by removal. In the Nurture Programs, we have found the headwaters of that stream and they are here in the river of life.

Senators, I thank you for your kind attention to the matter before you today and encourage you to support SB 961, the future of our communities depend on the action we take this session.