

Submitter: Emily Culbertson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB691

Hello, I'm Emily Culbertson. I work for BestCare Treatment Services, and we are the Deschutes County pilot of the Nurture Oregon Program. I have worked in Behavioral Health for over 10 years and with this program for 4 years. I am a certified substance use disorder counselor, peer mentor, birth doula, and am in school pursuing my license for clinical social work. I wanted to share with you why programs like these in Senate Bill 691 are important. I want to share that I'm a person in long term recovery with 13 years of sobriety. I care about this work greatly because 19 years ago I was a pregnant mother with a full-blown meth addiction. I had a lack of family and community support and didn't know how to get the help I needed, so I continued to use drugs. After I delivered my son, my addiction continued and I ended up in prison, it wasn't till my son was 5 years old that I found recovery. I needed a program like Nurture Oregon. I shared my personal story because WE DO RECOVER.

As a behavioral Health provider in a rural area, there have been major challenges working with the one hospital system within our area and overcoming the stigma around addiction. Lack of trauma informed care, lack of education on addiction, and providers in this area saying, "we don't treat those patients." When they actually do. But our Nurture Oregon site is making progress. We are building and strengthening relationships, we are improving health outcomes, avoiding expensive and isolating Neonatal Intensive Care Unit stays, and avoiding removals by Child Welfare. We are making a huge impact with the families we serve.

Everyday our team works with people who need people like us to show them the way to recovery, that our lived experience can help others, and our team has no judgment or bias of their substance use during pregnancy. We need to continue outreach efforts to this vulnerable population and to help strengthen families to avoid continued trauma for parents and children. We need to keep families together, we need to continue to have access to life saving treatment services with individualized care, Nurture Programs make all this possible. There are many people in Oregon who are pregnant or delivering with substance use disorder and about to face the worst day of their life: the removal of their infant. They are scared, they are full of shame and this can be prevented. Treatment needs to be available for these individuals. If this bill were to be passed and expansion was possible, I would love to see expanded Nurture Services at our other rural BestCare programs in Crook, Jefferson, and Klamath Counties. I hope you understand the urgency of passing this bill as it will allow us to continue to serve this extremely vulnerable AND deserving population AND will help to keep families united, healthy and strong.

