



1785 NE Sandy Blvd #300

Portland, OR 97232

youthrightsjustice.org

(503) 232-2540

Natalie Hollabaugh

Staff Attorney, Youth, Rights & Justice

Support for HB 2555

February 19, 2025

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Chotzen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the Committee,

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ), a non-profit public defense provider, has been dedicated exclusively to juvenile law for 50 years. Each year, we provide holistic, client-centered representation to hundreds of children, youth, and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system.

Through our advocacy for Oregon's children, youth, and parents, we often see the same systemic problems and we work to change the policies that contribute to these problems. One glaring systemic problem is that Black, Indigenous, Latino and other people of color are overrepresented in child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

YRJ supports HB 2555 because it seeks to prevent a well-documented adverse childhood experience: child separation from a parent or primary caregiver. This separation has been linked to a lifetime of poor outcomes for children.

Experiences during childhood significantly impact lifelong health and well-being. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are preventable, potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. The original ACE Study identified seven types of adverse childhood experiences: three forms of child abuse and four household challenges. One of the original household challenges studied was child-caregiver/parent separation due to incarceration.

Exposure to ACEs is linked to several negative outcomes in adulthood, including chronic disease, mental health and substance abuse issues, lower educational achievement, fewer job opportunities, and premature death.

Not only is separation from parents an ACE, but it can also exacerbate the effects of other stressors children experience. A buffering adult, typically a child's primary caregiver, can improve a child's ability to cope with ACEs. Research has shown that supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults, especially early in life, can help prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress caused by ACEs.

A compounding concern is that placement in foster care can negatively affect a child's well-being. One key measure of this is graduation rates. Oregon foster youth have notably lower

graduation rates compared to nearly all other groups tracked by the Oregon Department of Education. For the 2023-2024 cohort, the four-year graduation rates were as follows: Oregon Foster Youth: 51%, Oregon Homeless Students: 61.3%, Oregon Students with Disabilities: 68.8%, and the overall graduation rate for Oregon Students: 81.8%.

The Family Sentencing Alternative Program (FSAP) reduces recidivism and keeps families together. Created by the Legislature through HB 3503 (2015), FSAP diverts pregnant mothers, recent parents, and primary caregivers from incarceration into strict community supervision. Participants in this program can receive vocational training, complete parenting skills classes, and access other supports that help keep families healthy and united.

By making FSAP a permanent program through HB 2555, the Legislature would allow more eligible parents and primary caregivers to participate and therefore strengthen families, reduce the strain on the foster care system, and improve long-term outcomes for children.

Thus far, FSAP has proven successful. In Washington County, there was a 100% success rate over a three-year period, where participating parents and caregivers were not convicted of any new misdemeanor or felony offenses.

FSAP promotes family unity while ensuring that Oregon's limited resources are used effectively. It addresses the needs of children by allowing them to remain with their parents and primary caregivers, while also supporting the goals of the criminal justice system—reducing recidivism, protecting the public, and minimizing incarceration when strict supervision and supportive resources can lead to positive rehabilitation outcomes.

We urge the committee to support HB 2555. Thank you for your consideration of this critical program.

Sources:

Gervin, D. W., Holland, K. M., Ottley, P. G., Holmes, G. M., Niolon, P. H., & Mercy, J. A. (2022). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investments in adverse childhood experience prevention efforts. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 62(6 Suppl 1), S1–S5.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2021.11.014>

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. (n.d.). *Toxic stress*. Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. Retrieved February 18, 2025, from
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. (n.d.). *ACEs and toxic stress: Frequently asked questions*. Harvard University. Retrieved February 18, 2025, from
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/infographics/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>

Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Cohort graduation rate*. Oregon.gov. Retrieved February 18, 2025, from <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/students/pages/cohort-graduation-rate.aspx>

Washington County District Attorney. (2024, July). *Family sentencing alternative pilot (FSAP)*.
Washington County District Attorney. Retrieved February 18, 2025, from
<https://www.washingtoncountyda.org/family-sentencing-alternative-pilot-fsap>