



February 18th, 2025

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

First, I'd like to thank the chair and committee for this opportunity to testify today.

My Name is Nicole Clark, and I am the primary Alcohol & Drug counselor with Project Nurture through Legacy Health. I am here today to tell you about why passing SB 691 to support Nurture programs is so important and why we need your support NOW.

I identify as a person in long term recovery, meaning I have been clean and sober for 10+ years. I am the mother of 3 boys, ages 14, 16, and 21. While in my addiction I experienced Child Welfare involvement, the foster care system and lack of community support or information needed to make an informed decision about my own health and the health of my children. There were no Nurture programs at that time.

Once in recovery, my experience as a parent with an addiction was my sole motivator to work in the recovery field. At the age of 33, after completing treatment for a second time, I got my GED and went to college. I began my career in 2018 as a treatment counselor at Project Network, the ONLY residential treatment program for African American women and children in Oregon, where I was treated for my own addiction. I was contracted to work with Project Nurture the same year.

I now work 5 days a week with Project Nurture at Legacy. I run 4 two-hour treatment groups each week. In between I meet with participants one on one to make treatment and relapse prevention plans and complete assessments to get them into treatment when they need it. We currently have more than 80 patients who are pregnant or postpartum, and this is at JUST ONE Project Nurture site. Any given week our team gets called for new and established patients, who have just arrived at the hospital, pregnant or to give birth, each with completely different needs. Some need immediate help to get treatment, some needing support through medical challenges, some needing advocacy with DHS after giving birth, but ALL feeling the same guilt and shame that has kept them fearful of receiving help and treatment. I am certified and capable of doing many things to help each client, but most of all, I am there, creating a safe space and humanizing each person so they don't feel condemned and alone and letting them know that there is a way out with treatment, recovery housing, medical care, and the community that we build through Project Nurture.

This is not an easy job. We're often exhausted and struggle to reach each client because of our huge caseload. At this time, I am the only counselor at our site. I stay in this field because our community is suffering, and there are not enough resources and/or support. I wake up as motivated as possible to help in all ways I can, but the fact is, there just isn't enough of us to go around.

SB 691 is not going to fix all the challenges, but it would give us some much-needed funding and support to expand our programs and continue to serve our communities. We know that the Nurture programs work, and many of the women who have gone through the program are now, like me, working in the recovery community. We are building a community and a workforce. We just need to grow so that it is not on the backs of our small, overwhelmed teams. I urge you to support SB 691.

Thank you again,

Nicole Clark, CADCI, Project Nurture

Nicclark@lhs.org