

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Dana Hepper, Children's Institute
Date: Wednesday, February 19, 2025
Re: HB 2555 - Family Sentencing Alternative Program

Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Chotzen & Wallan,, and members of the Committee,

My name is Dana Hepper, and I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Institute. Our vision is to make Oregon the best place to be a kid. **Children's Institute urges your support for HB 2555.** Family Sentencing Alternative keeps families together - and that helps children thrive.

Young children develop in the context of their families and communities - from the everyday interactions they have with consistent adults who love them. Children's brains make 1 million neural connections per second, establishing critical brain infrastructure. This essential early brain development is negatively impacted by adverse child experiences - like experiencing a parent being incarcerated. Child development is positively impacted by consistent relationships with caregivers.

Family Sentencing Alternative keeps families together by diverting pregnant mothers, recent parents, and primary caregivers away from a term of incarceration and into strict community supervision. In the community supervision program, program participants can receive vocational training, parenting classes, and other support that will keep families healthy and together. **This approach aligns with the science of child development.**

This program has been in operation in five counties for a decade, and it has demonstrated important success. HB 2555 makes the program permanent and makes important updates, especially allowing true primary caretakers of

children (e.g. a grandmother or grandfather is the one taking care of the child, but is not the legal guardian) to receive services through this program.

Children's Institute urges your support for Family Sentencing Alternative (HB 2555).