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To: Senate Committee on Human Services  
From: Lisa Kay Williams, Supervising Attorney  
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**Re: Support for SB 875**

Dear Chair Gelser-Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, 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.

YRJ Supports Senate Bill 875 which promotes the dignity and respect of Oregon children in foster care. The bill recognizes that rights are meaningless without knowledge and an opportunity to uphold them. The bill seeks to inform Oregon foster children of their fundamental rights and promotes fulfillment of these fundamental rights through unimpeded and unmonitored access to counsel.

The State of Oregon recognizes that children are individuals who have legal rights.

- **Freedom from abuse:** Children have the right to be free from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or exploitation.
- **Basic needs:** Children are entitled to basic needs such as adequate food, clothing, and shelter.
- **Permanency with a safe family.**
- **Education:** Children are entitled to a free and appropriate education.
- **Freedom from self-incrimination:** Children are protected from self-incrimination

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services have the following additional rights:

- **Least Restrictive Environment:** Children in DHS custody have the right to live in the least restrictive environment.

- **Healthcare:** Children have the right to routine and necessary medical, dental, and mental health care and treatment.
- **Juvenile court participation:** Children have the right to fully participate in juvenile court proceedings involving them.
- **Consult with an attorney:** Children have the right to consult with an attorney privately.
- **Family & sibling relationships:** Children have the right to visit and communicate with family members, including siblings.
- **Cultural and religious activities:** Children have the right to attend cultural and religious activities that align with their beliefs.
- **Enrichment activities:** Children are entitled to opportunities for extra-curricular, cultural, and personal enrichment activities consistent with their age and development.
- **Financial independence:** Children have the right to earn and keep their own money.

Research shows that maintaining sibling relationships when children enter foster care is key to positive outcomes while sibling separation causes harm.

Placing children with their siblings after removal from their parents is crucial for their emotional and mental well-being. Sibling separation increases trauma, instability, and identity issues, while keeping siblings together helps reduce these negative effects and promotes stability. It also increases the chances of successful reunification with parents and adoption, while reducing placement disruptions.

Children placed with siblings tend to perform better academically, experience fewer behavioral problems, and develop stronger social skills into adulthood. They also benefit from emotional support provided by their siblings in foster care.

If siblings cannot be placed together, maintaining frequent visitation is key to preserving relationships, improving mental health, and fostering a sense of belonging and stability. Regular contact helps children feel more socially competent and can even improve their future financial circumstances.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

#### **Sources:**

Or. Const. Art. I, § 12.

ORS 419B.090

ORS 419B.875

ORS 339.115

OAR 413- 010-0180-0230

American Bar Association (or other organization). *Sibling Relationships are Sacred: Benefits of Sibling Placement and Contact—Social Science Support for Your In-Court and Out-of-Court*

*Legal Advocacy: A Tool for Lawyers*. 2023. <https://www.publiccounsel.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ABA-Sibling-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>