

JUVENILE ADVOCACY COLLECTIVE

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Re: HB 2614 Amendments Regarding Consortia

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Chotzen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

On behalf of the Juvenile Advocacy Collective (“JAC”), thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the sunset extension for consortia. While we appreciate Rep. Kropf including a sunset extension for consortia to 2029 in the -1 and -2 amendments, we urge the Committee to eliminate the sunset entirely or alternatively consider a longer extension that requires OPDC to conduct a better analysis on costs and case outcomes.

JAC is a non-profit consortium and the sole provider of juvenile defense in Marion County. Our group consists of 17 attorneys who represent parents and children in the child welfare system and children who have been accused of violating the law. The type of law we practice is specialized and necessitates an understanding of the Oregon Juvenile Code, the Oregon Criminal Code, the Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act, and administrative law. Our work also requires “soft skills,” as our clients include children experiencing abuse and neglect, and benefits from longstanding relationships with community providers including juvenile probation officers, recovery mentors, foster parents, Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) caseworkers, and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). Each of our attorneys has their own office and employs at least one staff member. For over 30 years, we have been a trusted provider of high-quality public defense services in Marion County.

Many of our members have joined JAC after previously working in adult criminal defense or prosecution and are drawn to consortia work because of the opportunity to continue in public service while having the flexibility of operating independent offices. We provide all lawyers with a rigorous training and mentorship program for their first full year as a member of JAC. We also require members to participate in regular continuing education courses specific to juvenile law, which include American Bar Association, National Association of Counsel for Children and Gault Center standards, as well as meeting locally three times per month as a group to ensure pending cases are appropriately staffed, share updates specific to our county, and invite community partners to provide input. As a non-profit entity, we have a Board that meets monthly to discuss implementation of our contract with OPDC and supervision of our attorneys. Our current Board

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has over 150 years of combined juvenile experience. Our model works; even during the public defense crisis we have fulfilled all juvenile public defense service needs in Marion County while maintaining very little turnover. Our turnover has historically involved our former attorneys becoming sitting Marion County judges or retiring.

The consortia model is particularly vital to juvenile law. Juvenile dependency cases typically require separate attorneys for each parent and often each child; it is not uncommon for a juvenile dependency case to have upwards of five defense attorneys, and on occasion we have cases where twelve defense attorneys have been required. The consortia model allows us to handle these cases within our group as we maintain separate offices.

Sunsetting consortia will exacerbate the issues of attorney recruitment and retention in this vital field. Most, if not all, of our attorneys will choose not to contract directly with the State of Oregon and would instead turn to private practice. Many of our members have done this work for dozens of years and will turn to private practice in lieu of contracting with OPDC. If consortia are sunsetted, our county will lose experienced and dedicated juvenile lawyers. Please consider eliminating the sunset entirely, or at a minimum consider an extension that requires OPDC to conduct an analysis on the cost and effectiveness of different provider types.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors, Juvenile Advocacy Collective