

To: Senator Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Linthicum and
Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services
From: Shelly Smith, Executive Director, Oregon Child Abuse Solutions (OCAS)
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Date: March 7, 2025

RE: SB 743- Neutral

Oregon Child Abuse Solutions (OCAS) is the statewide network of Children's Advocacy Centers. There are 24 children's advocacy centers in Oregon serving all 36 counties. The mission of OCAS is to elevate Oregon's child abuse prevention and response by strengthening children's advocacy centers, training first responders, and building public support to ensure children – in all Oregon communities – receive quality, timely, and healing-centered care. While we write to express our concern with SB 743 as drafted, we understand and appreciate that more work is being done on this bill.

Children's Advocacy Centers play a vital role in the evaluation of suspected child abuse, providing specialized forensic interviews and medical assessments. Conducted by physicians/medical professionals with expertise in child abuse pediatrics, these medical evaluations document injuries, assess for signs of abuse or neglect, and provide expert findings to law enforcement for prosecution and child welfare for safety planning. Forensic interviews, performed by highly trained professionals, are recorded, securely protected, and designed to gather critical information in a developmentally appropriate and legally sound manner. Oregon Child Abuse Solutions respectfully wishes to echo many of the considerations raised by the Oregon District Attorneys Association at the hearing on March 6, 2025, including concerns about the lack of definitions for terms and processes that may place law enforcement standards on DHS Caseworkers who have different responsibilities. We are also deeply concerned that the recordings will create a public record that should not be publicly released. We appreciate the Chair's comments at the hearing, and that Committee members and stakeholders will be convening to refine language.

Finally, many of Oregon's Children's Advocacy Centers have been reporting concerning trends related to a decline in referrals to Children's Advocacy Centers from DHS caseworkers. Referring children to Children's Advocacy Centers when there is a question of abuse is best practice, reduces trauma to the child, and helps to ensure perpetrators are held accountable. The statewide network and individual Centers are working with the agency to address this alarming trend, and we urge DHS leadership to ensure that SB 743 does not contribute to this trend.

OCAS understands the intent behind SB 743 and supports fair and accurate investigations. As the expert entity in gathering comprehensive information through forensic interviews and medical assessments, CACs ensure that key multidisciplinary partners have the critical details needed to make informed decisions regarding child safety, criminal investigations, and next steps. **While OCAS is concerned with SB 743 as drafted, we appreciate that more work on this bill is coming.**