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March 11, 2025

To: Sen. Lisa Reynolds, Chair
Sen. Dick Anderson, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

From: Alison Kelley, JD, CEO
Liberty House

Re: Request Support for SB 1013

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of SB 1013, providing key funding to Liberty House, the Children's Advocacy Center for Marion and Polk Counties¹. Liberty House provides comprehensive child abuse assessments² for children referred for concerns of sexual child abuse, physical child abuse, neglect, trafficking and witnessing/exposure to domestic violence. Liberty House serves as the Designated Medical Professional for Karly's Law under ORS 419.023(2)(a)(B) for Marion and Polk Counties. Liberty House is one of 24 children's advocacy centers (CACs) in Oregon and a member of the statewide Oregon Child Abuse Solutions (OCAS, <https://oregoncas.org/>) Liberty House is one of over 960 CACs nationwide and is accredited through the National Children's Alliance (NCA; <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/>). In addition to the Clinic, Liberty House offers trauma-focused, evidence-based psychotherapy for children referred for trauma, as well as for adults who experienced childhood trauma. Annually, we serve approximately 1,000 children in those two programs and another 1,500 adults in our Prevention Education Program. We have served over 15,000 individuals in our first 25 years.

First, our sincere thanks to Senator Deb Patterson for facilitating this conversation by introducing SB 1013. Members of the Committee, Liberty House seeks your support for SB 1013 which will provide one-time bridge funding to support the expansion of our services to rural North Marion County as well as protect the organization from threatened federal budget cuts. We are requesting \$5 million (\$2.5 million annually) support the costs associated with bringing critical, life-saving pediatric assessment services to rural, underserved communities surrounding Woodburn and North Marion County. These costs include recruitment, onboarding, training and work of specially-trained pediatric medical providers, forensic interviewers, intake/family support specialists, front desk and interpreters.

Child abuse is uniquely destructive and widely recognized as a serious public health crisis. While we may imagine the problem to be invisible or to play out behind closed doors, the effects can be plainly seen in every major community in Oregon facing the crisis of homelessness. Researchers now understand that children growing up in homes with parents suffering addiction have both a higher likelihood of being abused or

¹ Oregon Revised Statutes 418.782(3).

² ORS 418.782(2).

neglected as well as a higher incidence of becoming addicted themselves as they grow up³. As we are all well aware, untreated substance abuse can lead to a destructive cycle of job loss, poverty, homelessness, and unsafe conditions for the next generation of children. Why the link to addiction? When people are in emotional pain, like physical pain, the most natural thing in the world is to make the pain stop. If the adults around a child don't have the resources they need, the child won't, either, and they will be drawn to the closest thing to make the pain stop. This destructive cycle is producing incalculably high costs to Oregon families and policy makers.

Liberty House is the one-stop resource to stop the cycle in the communities we serve. It has taken ten years of solid work to build a first-rate team at Liberty House, which now includes experienced and highly trained specialists in the field of child abuse assessment medicine. During that time we have tripled our impact in terms of numbers of children and adults served, program offerings, and geographic location. Child abuse medicine is a subspecialty in pediatrics and our work as an independent, neutral resource supports both the children and the families as well as the professionals working hard to keep children safe and hold offenders accountable. **As the DMP for Marion and Polk Counties for Karly's Law, Liberty House now offers same-day and next day appointments to help children, families and the professionals working with them to access resources in a timely way.**

Importantly, our work can help rule out as well as diagnose abuse. We provide a safe environment in which children have the time they need to describe what they've experienced. Our specialist medical providers have the training and experience to ensure an accurate diagnosis. That is the first step in healing. Our team of trauma therapists can help children emerge from clouds of shame and deep emotional wounding. This helps the trauma loosen its grip so that children are not held back by emotional pain they don't understand.

Our partners in North Marion County have long sought the presence of our services in their community because lack of affordable transportation options means that children born into certain zip codes can't access our services. After three years of careful planning our leaders embarked on the project to expand services by leasing part of a medical office building. We were ready to see children beginning in May 2024, meaning we brought our services to children more rapidly than had we launched a 5-year capital campaign and done a construction project. Projected demographic studies highlighting significant population growth in the next 5-10 years makes this a critically important project.

Although Liberty House's services are statutorily required, government grants comprise only 13.7% of what it costs to operate. Insurance billing brings in 27.8%, for a combined total of under 42% of our revenue. That means *over one-half of our budget (50%) must come from private sources.* Private donations and grants can fluctuate wildly from year to year. That is a challenging and fragile system to operate in as we provide vitally important services to children who have experienced abuse and trauma. Additionally, threatened federal budget cuts to Medicaid would pull the rug out from under us.

³ American Addiction Centers (<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/blog/the-link-between-child-abuse-and-substance-abuse>); see also the work of Gabor Mate, MD, a leading family practice researcher in Vancouver, BC; <http://drgabormate.com>.

Page Three

Letter to Oregon Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
March 11, 2025

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please understand that at the federal level, cuts to the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) are projected to be 42%; for Liberty House, that would represent the loss of one medical provider which would be crippling. CACs and the children they serve all over the State of Oregon would suffer. We urge the support of all of our legislators for HB 3196 which would provide \$18.5 million to backfill the projected shortfall. Without that funding, our CACs will be in crisis. We also urge the support of the Ways and Means Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety for Policy Option Package (POP) 327 which would protect the \$6 million investment for CACs we have worked so hard to obtain. As a Board member of OCAS, it is my responsibility to urge the legislature's support for these funding asks.

In addition to those critically important bills which support all CACs in Oregon, SB 1013 is vitally important to Liberty House, a unique service provider in Marion & Polk Counties. The needed funds will support our expansion as well as protect our core services from threats to federal funding and Medicaid, at this moment, we risk losing everything we have worked for twenty-six years to build. The funding system for Oregon CACs is too fragile. This is why we are asking for your help.

SB 1013 has critical funding for Liberty House as we provide our essential services children who have experienced abuse, neglect, trauma, and grief. We ask for your support for SB 1013. Thank you!

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Alison S. Kelley, CEO