

Testimony in Opposition to Oregon House Bill 3835

To: Members of the Oregon House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Subject: Opposition to Oregon House Bill 3835

Date: 3/13/25

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Oregon House Bill 3835, which has deeply troubled our Head Start program and many other advocates for the rights and well-being of vulnerable children in Oregon. We are shocked that this bill has made it this far in the legislative process, as it poses a significant threat to the safety and rights of children, especially those who are already vulnerable due to disability, abuse, and trauma.

We urge you to carefully consider the following dangerous provisions of this bill:

1. **Limits Investigations to Only DHS-Paid Providers:** House Bill 3835 limits investigations into sexual abuse cases to only those incidents where the accused is a DHS-paid provider. This means that if any other individual in the home harms a child, it will not be investigated. This restriction undermines the safety of children in Oregon and sends the message that only certain types of abuse are worthy of investigation. All allegations of abuse should be thoroughly investigated, regardless of the perpetrator's relationship with DHS.
2. **Restricts Investigations of All Types of Abuse:** The bill also severely restricts the ability of DHS to investigate allegations of abuse if they are reported outside of the central hotline. This is a dangerous provision that hinders the timely identification and intervention of child abuse cases. Abuse should be investigated regardless of how it is reported, as children deserve protection no matter where or how the report is made.
3. **Deems Dangerous Seclusion and Restraint Practices Acceptable:** House Bill 3835 shockingly deems illegal seclusion and restraint practices acceptable unless a child dies or is permanently disfigured. This provision is appalling, as it sanctions practices that are widely considered abusive and harmful to children. No child should be subjected to seclusion and restraint under any circumstances, and we must put an end to these practices, not give them legal approval.

4. **Removes Independent Oversight of DHS:** The bill removes nearly all independent oversight of the Department of Human Services (DHS), including oversight by juvenile courts and other independent bodies. Independent oversight is essential to ensure accountability and transparency in DHS operations. Without this oversight, there will be no effective way to hold the department accountable for its actions, leaving children at risk of mistreatment and neglect.
5. **Allows Unchecked Placement of Children in Out-of-State Facilities:** House Bill 3835 would allow DHS to send already traumatized children to unsafe, out-of-state facilities without the need for independent court approval. This provision is especially concerning for children who may be placed far away from their families, further traumatizing them and potentially placing them in environments where their safety is not guaranteed. Every child deserves to be placed in a safe, supportive environment close to their family and community.
6. **Guts Restrictions on Seclusion and Restraints for All Students:** The bill also guts Oregon's existing restrictions on the use of seclusion and restraints in schools. These practices are harmful to students and often exacerbate trauma, especially for students with disabilities. By loosening these restrictions, we are putting children in harm's way and allowing for potentially abusive practices to continue in schools.
7. **Enables DHS to Place Foster Youth in Homeless Shelters:** House Bill 3835 enables DHS to house foster youth in homeless shelters, regardless of whether their mental and physical health needs are being met. Foster youth are among the most vulnerable members of our society, and placing them in unsafe, unstable living situations like homeless shelters can exacerbate their trauma and put them at greater risk of harm.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge you to reject House Bill 3835. This bill represents a grave threat to the safety, dignity, and well-being of vulnerable children in Oregon, and its passage would send a dangerous message that the state is unwilling to protect those who need help the most.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We trust that you will act in the best interest of Oregon's children by opposing this harmful legislation.

Sincerely,

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