



ST. MARY'S HOME FOR BOYS

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March 20, 2025

Written Testimony

of Francis Maher before the

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Regarding: Support of HB 3835

Dear Chair Hartman and Members of the Committee,

St. Mary's Home for Boys is a Residential Treatment, Day Treatment, and Outpatient Mental Health facility located in Beaverton, Oregon. We contract with the Oregon Department of Human Services and the Oregon Youth Authority to provide Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) to some of the state's most severely behaviorally and emotionally disturbed adolescent males. As a licensed Child Care Agency and Qualified Residential Treatment Program, we are deeply committed to providing these youth with intensive, life-changing care.

Many of you may be familiar with the tragic case of Jacob, a youth in Child Welfare custody who died after his severe mental health needs went untreated due to his refusal to consent to treatment. Jacob represents the very demographic we serve. Our clients face complex, co-occurring behavioral and mental health challenges. Many have endured profound loss, abandonment, abuse, and neglect, which understandably leaves them angry and distrustful of adults. On average, our youth have been through 6.4 prior placements, and those most in need of treatment are often the most resistant to it.

Unfortunately, current regulatory misalignment significantly impedes our ability to maintain a safe and supportive environment—both physically and psychologically. For example, safely intervening with youth who weigh over 160 lbs. poses a major challenge. Furthermore, a culture of fear has developed among our staff, who are often concerned about potential regulatory repercussions. Last fiscal year alone, we documented 111 incidents of self-harm, 67 incidents of physical assault toward staff, and 86 incidents of peer-to-peer physical assault.

Most concerning, 50% (n=15) of our unscheduled terminations were directly tied to regulatory misalignments. As a result, these 15 youth were placed in psychiatric residential treatment, hospitalized, incarcerated, or temporarily lodged in hotels due to the lack of viable placement options.

Additionally, our Client Advisory Council has raised concerns about delays in staff responses to peer antagonism, sexualized comments, and personalized attacks. The Council has recommended that staff be more assertive in setting clear, reasonable, and enforceable limits for clients who are dysregulated and exhibiting aggressive behaviors. One client compared peer verbal and physical attacks to domestic violence, describing a pervasive sense of anxiety about his own safety, as well as the safety of his peers and staff.

While HB 3835 is insufficient in addressing all of these issues, it is an important step toward improving child safety, ensuring consistent reporting, reducing provider burnout, and enhancing the overall quality of care across Oregon's child-serving systems.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Maher', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Francis Maher, MBA

Executive Director

St. Mary's Home for Boys