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To: Joint Subcommittee on Ways and Means  
From: Heather Busby, Executive Director  
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Re: **HB 5031**

Dear Co-chairs Broadman and Evans and Members of the Committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ), a non-profit public defense provider, has been dedicated exclusively to juvenile law for 50 years. Each year, we provide holistic, client-centered representation to hundreds of children, youth, and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system.

We urge you to fund continuing service levels for all existing contract providers with a cost of living adjustment included.

The juvenile contract that YRJ has with the state is the multidisciplinary juvenile representation model known as the Parent Child Representation Program, or PCR. Ten counties in Oregon currently follow this model, which has been effective in producing positive outcomes and cost savings.

The key components of this multidisciplinary model include:

- Training
- Caseloads and reasonable compensation that permit ethical attorney performance
- Supervision
- Attorney Standards of Performance
- Access to multi-disciplinary staff such as social workers and investigators
- Access to experts as needed

This is an effective and efficient model with positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Research shows that multidisciplinary representation models that include an attorney and social worker team speed safe foster care exits, saving the state money. A New York study

compared outcomes for children whose parents were represented by a multidisciplinary law office versus children whose parents were represented by solo-practitioners. Multidisciplinary representation resulted in reunification 43% more often in the first year of care and 25% more often in the second year of care, without any negative impact on child safety. A Washington State study comparing multidisciplinary representation versus solo-practitioner representation found that children whose parents had multidisciplinary representation exited foster care to reunification 11% faster, exited to adoption 83% faster, and exited to guardianship 102% faster.

A Michigan study examined the outcomes of children who were represented by a multidisciplinary team versus children who were only represented by a solo-attorney. The study concluded that children with multidisciplinary representation experienced better outcomes: 20% greater dismissal rate; 15% increased use of relative foster care, and better preservation of family ties with about 10% fewer petitions to terminate parental rights.

One of our clients who was unable to testify herself, gave us permission to share her story, which is illustrative of how the juvenile justice and child welfare systems overlap and how effective representation can help break the generational cycle of systemic involvement, thus saving the state money long-term.

“I have been involved with the child welfare system in one way or another most of my life. I have spent time in group homes and mental health facilities. When I was charged with a crime as a juvenile, I got a lawyer from YRJ. She could explain what was happening and got the charges dismissed. DHS filed for custody of me and that lawyer stayed on my case. When things were going badly, I could ask my lawyer for help.

I did not have a lawyer for about a year, but DHS was still in my life. I had a baby, and DHS came to the hospital. They kept investigating me for months. I didn't know how to make them happy so they would leave me alone. I was working so hard to get stability for my baby. My own experiences as a child meant dealing with DHS was incredibly painful. I asked them to accommodate my disabilities in how they communicated with me, but they wouldn't. Finally, when my baby was 4 months old, DHS filed a petition in juvenile court and asked the court to take my baby. I got a lawyer from YRJ again that day. She convinced the judge that my baby was safe with me. She helped DHS communicate with me in a way that wasn't traumatic, so we could work with DHS and I could understand their concerns. DHS got more information and decided they did not need to be involved, so the case was dismissed. Without a lawyer, I think my baby would have been taken from me, and I don't know that I would have gotten her back.”

This multidisciplinary model is working in the counties in which it is in place and we urge the Legislature not to make changes that would negatively impact this.

Thank you for your consideration.

## Sources

US Dept. of Health & Human Services, [ACYF-CB-IM-21-02](#) (2021).

Administration for Children and Families, *High Quality Legal Representation for All Parties in Child Welfare Proceedings*, [ACYF-CB-IM-17-02](#), (2017).

Lucas Gerber, et al., [Effects of an Interdisciplinary Approach to Parental Representation in Child Welfare](#), *102 Child. & Youth Servs. Review* 1 (2019). A seven-year New York study of over 9000 families (18,000 children) found that the children of parents who were represented by a multidisciplinary law office spent on average four months less time in foster care compared to children of parents represented by a solo practitioner. The children experienced reunification 43% more often in the first year of care and 25% more often in the second year of care, without any negative impact on child safety.

Mark Courtney, Jennifer Hook, Matt Orme, [Evaluation of the Impact of Enhanced Parental Legal Representation on the Timing of Permanency Outcomes for Children in Foster Care](#) (2011). A Washington State study which followed 12,104 children who entered foster care over a three-year period demonstrated that parent representation with key components (training, reasonable caseloads, and strategic access to social work staff) led to children exiting foster care at higher rates than cases where parents received representation without key components. The exit to reunification was 11% faster, the exit to adoption was 83% faster and the exit to guardianship was 102% faster, compared with the control group.

Robbin Pott, *The Flint MDT Study: A Description and Evaluation of a Multidisciplinary Team Representing Children in Child Welfare* in [Children's Justice: How to Improve Legal Representation of Children in the Child Welfare System](#) (ABS Center on Children and the Law, eds. 2016). A two-year Michigan study found that multidisciplinary team (MDT) representation for children compared to children represented by an attorney alone resulted in the following benefits: quicker case resolution, (MDT dismissal rate of 31% versus 11% for the attorney alone group); increased use of Relative Foster Care by 15% better preservation of family ties.