



Oregon Juvenile Department Directors' Association  
*Representing Oregon's County Juvenile Departments*  
[www.ojdda.org](http://www.ojdda.org)

The Oregon Juvenile Department Directors' Association (OJDDA) opposes Senate Bill 1159 (SB 1159) in its current form. The Association has several concerns regarding the bill's potential impact on the existing systems for investigating child abuse and welfare within Oregon's juvenile justice system.

#### **-Existing Oversight Agencies**

There are multiple agencies already authorized by statute to investigate child abuse and complaints related to child welfare and juvenile justice services. These include law enforcement, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) - Child Welfare, and the Office of Training and Investigation and Safety (OTIS). The creation of an additional investigative body, the Children's Advocate, would be redundant and adds confusion rather than clarity to the current system.

#### **Redefinition of "Children" and Impact on System Separation**

A key concern is the redefinition of "juvenile justice youth" as "children" under SB 1159. This change undermines the clear distinction between youth involved in the juvenile justice system and children in the child welfare system. This separation was intentionally established by Senate Bill 1 in 1995, which created the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) and the local juvenile justice system to address juvenile justice matters separately from child welfare dependency issues. The proposed changes to definitions create confusion and could disrupt the legislative intent of Senate Bill 1.

#### **Duplication of Investigative Efforts**

The introduction of the Children's Advocate would unnecessarily duplicate existing investigative processes carried out by law enforcement, ODHS, and OTIS. Juvenile detention centers are currently investigated by law enforcement when there are any incidents or concerns. It is unclear in this bill as to how investigations by two different entities will be coordinated. This confusion does nothing to make youth safer and could potentially cause harm.

#### **Unclear Funding and Sustainability**

There is lack of clarity regarding the funding and sustainability of SB 1159. The bill does not provide sufficient details on the funding source or the long-term financial viability of the proposed office. As currently written the bill creates expanded administrative duties that may bring a significant fiscal impact to counties.

#### **Ambiguous Language and Potential for Misinterpretation:**

OJDDA is concerned over the vague language in SB 1159, with terms such as “may,” “reasonably believes,” “unreasonable,” and “adequate statement”. We believe these terms are poorly defined and open to subjective interpretation, which could lead to inconsistent implementation and complicate an already complex system.

**Call for Further Discussion:**

OJDDA asks for continued dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders involved in juvenile justice and child welfare to ensure that any new advocacy role is clearly defined, adequately resourced, and distinct from other agencies conducting investigations. We believe that any reforms should be developed through discussions to improve protections for children without duplicating existing services.

**OJDDA requests that SB 1159 not move forward.**

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