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## **Support for HB 5014 and HB 3196 April 16, 2025**

Honorable Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 5014 and to highlight another important bill - HB 3196. Both of these bills are vital to ensure victims of child abuse and neglect have the support and safety they need and deserve. HB 3196 will stabilize funding for CASA programs across Oregon in the upcoming biennium. I speak to you today as a former foster child, survivor of child abuse, and member of a family decimated by generational mental illness and substance use. These experiences have shaped me as an adult and I am now a passionate advocate for children as they navigate the foster care system.

My brother and I were placed in the foster care system at age 11 and 12, respectively, after living with a mother who struggled with severe and persistent mental illness and substance use and a father who choose not to engage in our life. My home life before being placed in foster care was one of confusion, fear, and terror as I worked to understand a mother plagued by delusions and mania who often lashed out at us when in the grips of her mental illness. She was married to a man who was physically and emotionally abusive. I was lucky in that when I was placed in foster care I was placed in a stable, long-term, and loving foster home. My brother was not so lucky and was placed in a series of group homes and foster homes where his abuse continued.

I had the benefit of being paired with trusted adults that helped me navigate the foster care and court systems, the trauma I experienced, and navigate as I prepared for life as an adult-all the things a parent should teach you. Perhaps most importantly I had support to apply for college and the support to believe I was smart and worthy enough to go to college. As a foster child you are often told that you will repeat the mistakes your parents made, that the statistics show you will end up homeless, mentally ill, and drug addicted. My adult support system took the time to tell me I didn't have to be that, they helped be know that I could do better.

My brother did not get those same messages. He went to group homes where staff were too busy to form a bond or rapport with one kid. He went to homes where his abuse continued and no one was there to listen when he said he was being abused. So, he went to the streets and started using drugs. He has perpetuated the cycle of drugs and mental illness. He did become a statistic.

This is why CASA programs are so vitally important. CASAs have the time to build the rapport and connection with foster children that are so vitally important to their future.

CASAs can help foster children navigate the multitude of systems they encounter and send the message they don't have to perpetuate the cycles of abuse, drug use, and violence that their families have been living through, their childhood does not have to define them, and they can go on to live happy, healthy and full lives.

However, CASA programs are only possible through dedicated volunteers and adequate funding. CASA programs are at risk without stable and sustained funding, foster children are at risk without this funding. If we don't act now, we risk losing the supports that vulnerable children, like me and my brother, so vitally need. Foster children need someone who will speak for them, someone who will walk with them through the many systems they encounter, ensuring their best interests and needs are prioritized. Ensuring someone will listen to them and let them know they can do better and don't have to become a statistic. We need resources and infrastructure to continue this vital work.

HB 3196 is crucial to ensuring CASA programs have the funding they need to operate effectively, so that no child, slips through the cracks. With your support, we can guarantee that CASA services remain available for foster children around the state who are supported through the powerful best-interest advocacy and that these programs are strengthened to provide the critical support necessary for children to heal, grow, and thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Noad  
CASA Supervisor & Volunteer  
CASA of Lane County