

Support for HB 5014 & HB 3196

April 17, 2025

Dear Honorable Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 5014 to support the Oregon Department of Justice Budget and highlight HB 3196, another important bill featured this session. These bills are necessary to ensure the safety of our communities and to ensure crime victims have the support needed. Specifically, HB 3196 would help stabilize funding for Oregon's Court Appointed Special Advocates ("CASA") programs after a steady decline in Victims of Crime Act funding. CASA's mission is to provide volunteers that guide children who have experienced abuse and neglect through court and child protective systems and advocate for the child's best interest in securing a safe, permanent home.

As a Board Member for CASA of Lane County, I have witnessed firsthand the invaluable contribution this organization makes to the well-being of the children who are receiving this best-interest advocacy. In particular, CASA volunteers mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences by acting as a trusted adult for those who need it most. Children who are paired with a CASA volunteer are half as likely to reenter the child welfare system after being reunified with family or after being placed in a safe and permanent home. These children are also more likely to get their court-ordered services and perform better both academically and behaviorally in school.

In 1987, the Oregon legislature recognized that the advocacy CASA volunteers provide is so crucial to children finding a safe, permanent home, that it mandated courts to appoint one to every child in foster care. Although the funding required to meet that statutory mandate is approximately \$20 million, HB 3196 is vital to CASA making strides toward satisfying that mandate. Last year, CASA of Lane County provided services to 413 children, which is only 40% of the children who have experienced abuse and neglect in our county and that should have received advocacy. Funding for just one CASA staff member has the ability to support 30 volunteers, who each advocate for the best interest of at least one child or group of siblings in foster care.

Not only is CASA an efficient organization with a significant return on investment, but the services that CASA's provide results in downstream budgetary savings to the State. For instance, CASA programs assist with permanent placements, connect youth to treatment services, and enhance graduation success rates. In addition, CASA volunteers uphold the Oregon Foster Children's Bill of Rights to protect children from reabuse while reducing the State's exposure to costly litigation.

I urge you to consider the immense value that CASA programs bring to our community and to support measures to stabilize funding for these vital services. By doing so, you will be investing in the health, stability, and future of our children and our society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Stubbs