

Submitter: Elyse Meardon  
On Behalf Of: Youth Progress Association and foster parent  
Committee: House Committee On Rules  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3835

I am representing Youth Progress Association as the executive director and I am also a certified foster parent for ODHS general foster care. I am writing today to encourage your support for HB 3835A. This important bill will help programs like ours continue to provide the care Oregon youth critically need and help open the pathway to increased access to care for children in our foster system. Did you know that kids in foster care cannot access the same services as kids on the Oregon Health Plan (OHP)?

HB 3835A will change that.

Youth Progress is licensed as a Child Caring Agency in Oregon to provide foster care for youth ages 13-21 with specially recruited and trained Proctor-Foster families. Proctor-Foster parents receive enhanced training and ongoing support to provide specialized care for individual youth in our program. We contract with the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) to provide Behavior Rehabilitation Services in the Portland Metro area to young people across Oregon. With safe and stable housing as the foundation, Youth Progress provides trauma-informed, culturally responsive therapeutic, educational, and vocational services to approximately 75 youth annually in our community of 40+ certified Proctor-Foster homes. This wrap-around program model gives youth in the foster care system a caring and dedicated community where they can heal and be supported as they build the necessary tools and life skills for successful transitions to adulthood and community life.

We see more and more youth referred to us with mild to severe mental health needs that are currently not being met, even though these children are wards of the state. Additionally, as a general foster care provider personally, I've had youth referred to live in my home that I could not intake due to severe mental health needs (these youth wouldn't even be good candidates for our programs at Youth Progress Association, let alone a general foster home).

Oregon's system of care for our youth is broken, but we can begin building a strong, robust, and lasting system that ensures our children have the care they need and deserve when they need it. No one wants to continue down this path we are on, which has left Oregon ranked last in the nation in youth care accessibility. More importantly, no one wants to continue to let our children down. As providers, we need your help to allow us the opportunity to be part of the solution moving forward.

Over the last 3 years, the System of Care Advisory Council (SOCAC) has invested

countless hours engaging with all stakeholders, including parents, self-advocates, youth, providers, agency representatives, psychologists, pediatricians, tribal representatives, advocacy groups like Disability Rights Oregon, and the public. Through that process, numerous issues have been identified and discussed extensively about how to ensure children in state care can access needed services and are safe from abuse. The product of this work is HB 3835.

In 2019, this esteemed legislative body enacted SB 1, which built SOCAC to do this vital work. It took its job and the task bestowed upon it very seriously. I believe it is the legislature's job now to support the work they asked of the council and the hard work of its members by supporting HB 3835A and supporting access with accountability for Oregon's youth.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Elyse