

Submitter: Sheila McGonigal

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3835

Senate Statement for  
HB3835A

Good Morning CHAIR BOWMAN and members of the committee. My name is Sheila McGonigal I am a former foster child here to testify to oppose HB3835A. Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to be here and speak on behalf of all of the children currently in the foster care system in Oregon.

In 1965 at the age of five years old after my Mother abandoned us, I was placed along with my siblings into the foster care system by Children Services Division as it was called back then. My earliest and most traumatic memories were of life in foster care. I was in the foster care system until I aged out in 1979.

It disheartens me that the foster care system hasn't changed in all the years since I was in the foster care. I vehemently oppose HB3835A which has language that removes necessary protections and what should be mandatory protections for children in our foster care system. Language such as the definition of what abuse is regarding use of prohibited restraints, as well as how abuse is reported and investigated. The language in this bill restricts access to a child's lawyer, CASA and caseworkers in addition to other changes in language that DO NOT protect the children in foster care.

When is the State of Oregon going to invest in the needs of the foster youth in their care? When I say invest I don't mean pawning them off to other states, at for profit facilities where there will be NO oversight for the care of these children. DHS ships them out of state and they become forgotten children.

DHS has sent foster children as young as 9 years old out of state before and it was a horrific failure. This was a decision that further traumatized children that have already suffered so much loss and trauma already in their lives. This practice continued until DHS came under scrutiny for what they did.

It is estimated that from 2018-2019, DHS spent roughly \$13 million dollars to place well over a 100 children in out of state facilities. Although I venture the cost was much more than that, since DHS transparency is about as clear as muddy water. Then there is the cost in trauma to the children that were sent out of state. You can't put a price on human trauma and pain.

Change begins from the top down and it's time for change. Its time as a state we start thinking of better alternatives then sending our foster children out of state. The State of Oregon can and must do better. It's time to look at the budget and spending of DHS. When they can dump \$13 million plus dollars into a band aid solve, it tells me that there is money to be used and budgeted much more appropriately to provide for the needs of these children. We need budget minded, out of the box thinking staff at DHS starting from the top to the bottom to find alternatives to any out of state care for foster children.

The System of Care Advisory Council which is a part of DHS says and I quote "it takes a village to raise a child". I think the village to which they refer lost a few villagers and tribal leaders along the way. If we were acting as a true village to these children there would be no circumstance in which they would even suggest we send our children to other states for care. I am certain Oregon taxpayers would be appalled if they knew this is how DHS is using their tax dollars.

A state of emergency can be declared for homelessness, but not the crisis that is our foster care system. Its apparent DHS can't manage their budget in such a way to provide the facilities, staff and resources that we need for our foster children to keep them here in Oregon.

It's time for our leaders to take a hard look at DHS, its budgeting practices, management and staffing. Change begins when the real problem is addressed. Our Oregon tax dollars should be used to keep these vulnerable foster children here in Oregon where they belong.