

Submitter: Andrea Kennedy-Smith  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Rules  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3835

Chair Bowman, Vice Chair Drazan, Vice Chair Pham, and members of the committee,

My name is Andrea Kennedy-Smith and for the last 18 years I've been a Paralegal at the Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Program. I am a member of SEIU Local 503 and the President of Local 200 for ODHS and OHA.

I am in support of HB 3835A and ask for your support. I am speaking as a union leader, state employee and mother of two children with disabilities, specifically to my experiences with a child that is unable to regulate his emotions and regularly becomes aggressive and violent. My 11-year-old son was in the public education setting until December of last year because he became increasingly aggressive and violent towards school staff and his classmates. My son found his way to the roof of the three-story middle school more than once and was throwing rocks down at people. Our schools need mental health supports on site everyday available to support the needs of the children. It is not fair that teachers and school staff are put in situations they are not prepared to deal with.

My son moved to a facility that has staff better trained, educated and experienced to handle children with behavioral challenges. A facility that is also in need of onsite mental health counselors daily to support the needs of these youth that are struggling. My son was frequently eloping from the building to walk to the highway. My son has been restrained due to violence, and I am in support of a trained restraint protocol for safety reasons. We should trust the trained staff to apply the appropriate safety measures.

Oregon continues to lack access to behavioral health treatment. We continue to see children struggling with emotional regulation, aggression and violence in school settings. My son is approaching discharge from day treatment as it's a short-term stabilization unit. He will not have continuation of care because there are no counselors accepting patients, or intensive in-home care providers in my county. So again, our children that are struggling in Oregon are not receiving the services they need. Unnecessary barriers to care are harming our children. We need to build a strong behavioral health network in Oregon, otherwise, the only option is for children to be placed out of state where they can get access to services. I support that otherwise our children are receiving no treatment or they are stuck waiting in emergency rooms or staying in hotels waiting to get the care they need.

Working for Child Welfare and other settings where you're serving complex behavioral issues is extremely challenging and traumatic. Made even more difficult when you don't have sufficient staffing levels and work loads of overtime because the need is high. We cannot have staff fearful of doing their jobs due to unnecessary reporting for investigations of abuse. These are specialized jobs and we need individuals willing to do this work. Child caring agencies have dedicated workforces and we need to prioritize the staff doing this work. We need to listen to the professionals serving these populations. We all care deeply and try our best to fulfill our responsibilities as stewards of the State.

Thank you for your time,  
Andrea Kennedy-Smith