

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

My name is Ana Day, Executive Director of Oregon Community Programs in Lane County, and I represent providers from the Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs in strong support of HB 3835.

You've heard how current regulations affect higher levels of care. I'm here to share the impact on therapeutic foster care (or TFC). These families welcome youth with significant behavioral needs into their homes to help them heal and grow in family settings. Treatment foster care is a critical part of the solution, yet the need continues to exceed capacity. Even with recent investments by ODHS in behavioral health treatment foster care overall capacity has reduced, and Oregon Alliance agencies must turn away a combined total of over 120 referrals each month.

Why? More and more youth referred to TFC have aggressive behaviors and complex needs in need of stabilization prior to being able to safely live in a community setting. Those higher levels of care are not available for all the reasons you have heard today. So youth who need residential care are referred to TFC, youth who need TFC are referred to outpatient behavioral health, and too many foster youth in resource homes who need outpatient behavioral health get no treatment at all. It's a displacement wave starting at the highest levels of care, shuffling every youth down to LESS care than they need, if they can even get that. When parts of our system are broken, all the other parts feel it.

At the same time, foster parents—who are volunteers, not employees—are facing the strain. If just making more calls to the hotline made kids safer with no unintended consequences, then most of us might agree it's a good idea. But the cost of so many procedurally required calls, even when no harm is suspected, results in false positives that scare even our most experienced foster parents. As a result, they feel they have to say no to accepting youth to whom they might otherwise say yes. Yes, nearly all of these allegations are screened out or unsubstantiated because we provide safe, quality care. But the resulting stress strains our volunteer workforce and closes down options for youth, rather than expanding them.

I'm in agreement that no one action will solve Oregon's behavioral health crisis, yet HB 3835 maintains strong safety oversight while removing barriers that drive away qualified caregivers without whom no other solution can succeed. Please support it to ensure youth can access the safe, appropriate care they deserve.