

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I write on behalf of Oregon Child Abuse Solutions, the statewide network of Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). CACs conduct child abuse medical exams and forensic interviews when there is concern of child abuse. There are 24 Children's Advocacy Centers serving all 36 counties in Oregon. I am writing to express concerns with SB 1579.

We know that child abuse is already significantly underreported, and we are concerned that adding criminal penalties to reports of child abuse, even if they ultimately prove to be false, will create a chilling effect on potential reporters.

It is not the role of a mandatory reporter to conduct their own investigation into whether child abuse is occurring. Their responsibility is to make a report to DHS when they have any suspicion that abuse may be occurring. DHS is the entity responsible for investigating reports, and they partner with entities such as Children's Advocacy Centers as part of that process.

The introduction of criminal penalties, including possible jail time, will almost certainly discourage reporting and may inappropriately encourage untrained mandatory reporters to conduct their own investigations.

We recognize that inaccurate reports of child abuse can sometimes occur in the context of custody disputes or other family conflict. It is the responsibility of DHS and their partners to determine when this is occurring and to close cases when appropriate.

Oregon Child Abuse Solutions respectfully encourages this Committee to reject SB 1579. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Shelly Smith
Executive Director
Oregon Child Abuse Solutions