

Dear Chair Hartman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Fernando Cervantes, and I submit this testimony in strong opposition to HB 4059.

HB 4059 proposes changes to how “threatened harm” is defined for purposes of determining whether a child has been abused and limits when child protection agencies can investigate reports of child abuse. These are serious changes to a core part of Oregon’s child welfare law.

Children with disabilities, especially nonverbal children, depend on adults and public systems to recognize danger early. Raising the threshold for intervention increases the risk that warning signs will be overlooked, because these children often cannot clearly communicate what is happening to them.

It is troubling to hear these changes discussed mainly in terms of statistics or workload. HB 4059 would reduce the number of cases that count as abuse and narrow investigative authority, which may make agency numbers look better, but it does not improve outcomes for children. Child safety should not be determined by ease of administration.

Child protection agencies are publicly funded and accountable through legislative oversight, and they are entrusted with difficult and necessary work. Addressing workload concerns by narrowing definitions or limiting investigations shifts risk onto children rather than strengthening protections.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to reject HB 4059.

Sincerely,

Fernando Cervantes