

**Testimony in support of House Bill 4024**  
**Kim Smith, Director**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**February 15, 2012**



My name is Kim Smith. I have been the Director of the Oregon Zoo since March 2010. As you may know, the Zoo is a service of Metro, the regional government of the Portland metropolitan area.

I am pleased to offer this testimony on behalf of Metro and the Zoo in support of House Bill 4024, which will lift the sunset on a law that has greatly improved the screening of people who work with children at the Zoo. (The original bill, HB 2007, passed without a single dissenting vote in 2009.)

The Oregon Zoo is a special place for children. Over the years, the Zoo has developed a wide range of programs to educate and care for school-aged children. More than 4000 children enroll each year in zoo camps, conservation internships, and youth development programs. Obviously, the safety of the children who participate in our various programs is of paramount importance to us.

Prior to the passage of HB 2207, the Zoo conducted background checks on prospective and current contractors, employees and volunteers using the tools available to us. But we knew the tools we had, and the results they produced, were far from perfect. In our search for a better way to protect children at the Zoo, especially children who are left in our care when they participate in camps and educational programs, we discovered the Child Care Division's Central Background Registry and worked with the Division and the Legislature to gain access to that system.

Screening through the Central Background Registry is thorough and reliable: it utilizes highly accurate law enforcement databases and includes review of relevant records of child protective services agencies. It is efficient: using multiple law enforcement databases it screens most applicants rapidly, and can quickly verify enrollment for applicants already on the registry. It is cost effective: our own attempts to replicate its screening were more expensive and less reliable than using the Registry itself because it uses more efficient screening tools.

As a condition of gaining access to the Central Background Registry, HB 2207 required Metro to enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the Child Care Division and to cover all direct and indirect costs of screening our contractors, employees and volunteers. We entered into an IGA with the Division in February of 2010 and have been operating under that agreement since that time. The current agreement expires at the end of next year, when the authorizing statute is currently scheduled to sunset. By all accounts, the process is running smoothly. Moreover, we have requested significantly fewer background checks than are allowed by the IGA and each check is proving to cost less than originally projected.

Our goal is to protect the children in our care, and we are pleased to have the Child Care Division as a partner in that effort. Passage of HB 4024 will enable us to continue this partnership to ensure the safety of children who visit our Zoo.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and for your support of HB 4024.