



SB123: RIGHTS OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

“Is it okay that I’m living in a home apart from my three other siblings and don’t get to see them?”

The life of a child or youth in foster care is complicated. At very young ages, youth are expected to make decisions that have lifelong consequences with little information. They are forced into a complex and unforgiving system, with no firm understanding of their role or rights. **SB123** will establish clear requirements for informing kids about those rights.

Many foster youth do not understand their rights and it is unclear where they should turn when those rights are violated. Oregon does not have a uniform system for informing youth of their rights or a formalized grievance process for foster youth to follow when those rights are violated. This keeps many of Oregon’s 13,000 foster youth disconnected from their siblings or on unwanted psychotropic drugs. **Not knowing you have rights – or not having anywhere to turn when those rights are violated – is like having no rights at all.**

Kids in Foster Care Have Rights

Youth ages 0-17 in foster care are prescribed psychotropic drugs at a ratio of 4:1 compared to non-foster care youth, but they don’t know they have any say in their own medical care.

Abuse or neglect often result in siblings being separated, but today, kids in foster care don’t know they have a right to maintain relationships with brothers or sisters.

“Is it true that I can’t get my drivers license just because I’m in foster care? But what if I have a job, have enough money for car insurance, and am doing well in school?”

Foster Youth Do Not Know Their Rights

“Is it okay if my foster parent opens all of my mail and withholds letters with no explanation?”

There is no one person whose job requires that they ensure kids in foster care understand their rights. Even when they do, the legalese used to describe foster youth’s rights is often so technical it doesn’t make any sense to a young person.

There Isn’t a Formalized Grievance Procedure When Youth Rights Are Violated

Even when youth know their rights are being violated, there is nowhere to turn. The lack of a clear and universal grievance process makes youth susceptible to ongoing abuse. Youth in care fear they will experience punishment or loss of privileges, or be shamed for speaking out since a formalized grievance procedure does not exist.

For a young person in foster care, these questions are real and often unanswered.

Oregon must ensure that children and youth in foster care understand their legal rights and understand the process to express legitimate concerns regarding their care.