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Expanding
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Empowering Youth to
Take Charge

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To: Members of Oregon Senate Human Services Committee

In my role as director of two programs that work directly with foster youth in Multnomah County I regularly hear of injustices against our participants and what seem to be basic rights violations. As a program geared toward assisting youth in achieving their goals, we often find ourselves in the place of youth advocate, because most of the time these young people aren't aware that they have rights (as human beings let alone as wards of the court) and certainly don't have the tools to advocate for themselves.

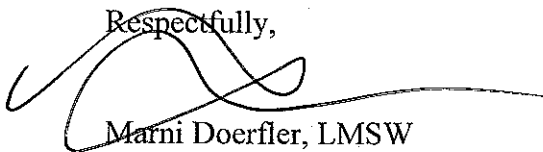
Youth locked out of foster homes for hours at a time, being kicked out of homes because of their sexuality, youth ignored for months on end by adults who are supposed to be their advocates, being denied information about court dates, being denied access to personal documents. These are the stories we hear. We understand that often there are legitimate reasons for what the youth is experiencing, but these young people don't even know that they have the right to ask "Why?" and that they have the right to get an honest answer.

While we don't mind advocating for youth, it is heart breaking that youth have zero power to advocate for themselves. Not to mention that we only serve a fraction of young people in foster care, leaving hundreds of others without the support they need for advocacy.

SB123 would give all foster youth the voice they need to advocate for themselves without the fear of being ignored or retaliated against. I fully support this bill and ask for your support as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this tremendously important bill.

Respectfully,



Marni Doerfler, LMSW