

To: Ways and Means Committee

From: Patience Wills, Mother of Terrance and Phillip

Date: March 26, 2013

Support for Public Defense Funding for Juvenile Cases

Committee members:

I wanted to come testify in person today, but our family has moved from Clackamas County, OR, to Tacoma, Washington.

My family is complete, thanks to the support, encouragement and undeniable devotion of Youth, Rights & Justice (formerly Juvenile Rights Project). Without the help of their attorneys, who knows where my two boys would be today? I don't know if they would even be alive.

I came to Youth Rights in 2007, based on the referral of my neighbor's mother. I had no idea what to do, where to go, or what rights my boy's or I had. All I knew was that I was trying to keep two boys safe from the abuse and neglect of their biological parents.

When I turned to the State of Oregon, they refused to help me. I was told by numerous case workers that "The boys were safe because they were in my care." With only a 6 month guardianship that could be revoked at ANYTIME by the abusers, I wanted something more to make sure these boys WOULD be safe! I frantically was waiting for returned phone calls for help.

Meanwhile, I was going to appointments and taking care of the boys, who were barely 2 and 4 years of age. They had multiple issues due to the abuse and neglect they had suffered. At the same time, I was trying to manage my full time childcare business and my family.

I finally found HOPE. I had an appointment with Youth Rights, and presented everything from the guardianship papers to the State's refusal of help. I brought them doctors notes and referrals, and an evaluation from CARES NW.

I was Blessed and relieved, when I got the news, Youth Rights would HELP! I never knew how much of a battle it would be. It was the longest 3 years of my life, from ecstatic times through heart-breaking disappointments. Our battle became not only with the biological parents, but at many times with the State of Oregon, too.

We had to give up our guardianship to the State in order to get their help. And we had to become a state-certified foster care home, in order to keep the Boys with us. To our disappointment we were then given the devastating news I could not be both a foster care home and a daycare provider at the same time. Thankfully, through the constant devotion and care of Youth Rights, and the many exceptions I had to apply for, it all came together and worked out in our favor.

The emotional havoc it can take to keep someone you love and care about safe. I'm so thankful for the support I found in Youth rights justice. I was so lucky to have Lisa and Julie and their assistants to help pursue the safety of my boys. The gentle caring attitude and respect we received made our fight for what is right worthwhile when the adoption was finalized in 2010.

Without the help, support and encouragement from Youth Rights, I honestly cannot say if my 2 boys would even be alive. They assisted in saving two precious lives! I will be forever grateful of the services I received to make my family complete with 2 additions. Today they are thriving and having fun, enjoying life as typical 7 and 10 year olds, knowing they are safe, loved and cared for by many.

I cannot stress enough, none of this would be possible without Youth Rights. Other children and families should have the right to have a happy ending, as well.