



# Children First for Oregon

*Speaking Up for Kids Since 1991*

TO: Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee  
FROM: Pamela Butler Children First for Oregon  
DATE: April 23, 2013  
RE: HB 2095

Chair Haas, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Pamela Butler, and I am the Child Welfare Policy Manager at Children First for Oregon. Children First's mission is to make long-term systemic change by advocating for programs and policies that keep children healthy and safe, and strengthen families. I am here in support of House Bill 2095.

SB 2095 will align the definition of "former foster child" with the federal definition, so that all higher education grants, tuition waivers, and scholarships are using the same language. **Children First supports this change for three main reasons:**

- 1.) Our office has received countless calls from foster parents, foster youth, and CASA's who are confused and frustrated that the various forms of financial aid do not define "former foster youth" the same way. From their perspective, a former foster youth is a former foster youth. **Trying to navigate the transition from foster care, the complexity of post secondary education, and federal financial aid is difficult enough-youth want Oregon to streamline the process and eligibility requirements.**
- 2.) The conflicting definition of "former foster youth" is creating an enormous implementation barrier as the Department of Human Services and OSAC attempt to vet eligible youth. **The goal of the 2011 law was to eliminate barriers to accessing higher education, not create new ones. This language alignment will bring the law closer to achieving its intended goal.**
- 3.) Updating the definition to include children subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act ensures that **children in foster care under the jurisdiction of the tribes are clear that they have the same support as their counterparts in state foster homes.**

In addition, the (-1) , amendment will fix a problematic implementation issue that has left over 500 youth on a list of "unable to determine for eligibility". Removing the three-year requirement from the legislation will allow the Department of Human Services to vet eligibility for all foster youth and get them on the path to higher education.

Streamlining the definition of "former foster child" and removing the three-year requirement for the purposes of educational grants, waivers, and scholarships makes sense. Also, it keeps the promise made in 2011 by the Oregon legislature to increase access to higher education for youth with no permanent families.

Thank you for your time,

Pamela Butler  
Child Welfare Policy Manager  
Children First for Oregon