

Catholic Community Services

A Forever Home for Everyone

Testimony on House Bill 3445 By Jim Seymour, Catholic Community Services May 28, 2013

Senator Bates, Representative Nathanson, members of the committee, for the record, my name is Jim Seymour. I am the executive director of Catholic Community Services of the Mid-Willamette Valley Central Coast. Catholic Community Services is a State-licensed and nationally accredited social service organization that serves more than 2000 children, youth, and adults each year. We provide foster care, treatment foster care and residential treatment for more than 100 children and youth on any given day. This total represents approximately ten percent of the Marion, Polk, and Yamhill County foster children but it is the ten percent with the most serious behavioral and emotional problems.

I am here today to testify in favor of HB 3445. HB 3445 is intended to provide children who are not thriving in regular foster care, as evidenced by multiple disrupted placements, what they need most; an opportunity to live responsibly in a nurturing home and caring community they can call their own. We call this a Community Home.

A Community Home is a home owned by Catholic Community Services on behalf of the foster children who live there. Foster parents are recruited, trained and supported 24 hours per day seven days per week to care for the children. We do everything in our power to support foster parents but if they decide to quit fostering they are the ones that move, not the youth. The youth get to stay in their home, neighborhood, and school with their friends, neighbors, and teachers.

Current child welfare practice is to move foster children who aren't thriving up and down a tiered system of care. If foster care isn't working, children are moved to treatment foster care. If treatment foster care doesn't work, they may be moved to residential care or even secure treatment settings. Then, because each tier of the continuum of care costs more to provide than the one below it, there is constant pressure to move the children back down the tiers until they reach a level of care that no longer meets their needs and the vicious cycle starts over again.

We have one young man living in a Community Home named Alan who had been in forty different placements by the time he came to us at ten years old. Every disrupted placement tended to solidify Alan's sense of not being wanted or loved. It set him back academically and increased the severity of his emotional and behavior problems.

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House Bill 3445 begins to address this problem by providing funds to scale up and evaluate the Community Home program.

Credible scientific evidence supports the premise that a safe, stable, nurturing home is the key social determinant of a child's health, success at school, and future financial self-sufficiency. Catholic Community Services has been testing this premise in the Community Homes for more than a decade using funds provided by a local philanthropist. We have found that 80% of the children and youth referred to us are able to live responsibly in a safe, stable, nurturing home when supports like the ones identified in HB 3445 are made available. In addition, we have found that these supports can be provided for less money than it takes to move a foster child up and down the tiered system of care.

If you look at the diagram titled Marion, Polk, and Yamhill County Foster Care System you will see that 80-100 Marion, Polk, and Yamhill County children enter the foster care system each month. You will also see that between 80-100 children exit the foster care system each month. This keeps the average daily foster care population fairly stable at about 1000 children on any given day.

If you look at the bottom of the diagram you will see that about 150 children are on what is called an APPLA designation. These children will grow up in foster care. About half of the APPLA kids are thriving. They are the ones that have found a foster parent who is providing a safe, stable, nurturing home.

Unfortunately, however, the other half of the APPLA kids are not thriving. These are the kids that HB 3445 will help us to reach.

With me today is Juan Gomez and Aubrey Boyce. They have a life time of experience in the foster care system and have benefited from living in a Community Home.

With your permission, they would like to share a little of their experience with you.

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