



Oregon
Foster Youth
CONNECTION

MEASURE: SB 123
EXHIBIT: 5
S. HEALTHCARE & HUMAN SERVICES
DATE: 3/21/13 PAGES: 2
SUBMITTED BY: Cain Stellings

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee,

Hello. My name is Cain Alexander Stellings. I am 16 years old and I live in Imbler, Oregon, which is about 5 hours east of here. I am a junior at Imbler High School. I have been in the foster care system for 3 years and I am here today with the Oregon Foster Youth Connection.

I believe that SB123 will make a huge impact on the 13,000 in care right now as well as those that will be enter the system in the future. I believe Oregon can make a change for the better and that other states will follow in our steps.

There are many reasons why SB123 is necessary for foster children. Foster children have specific rights that many foster youth do not understand. One of these rights is that foster children are allowed to talk to their caseworker in a private area. The reason that this is important is so that they can feel safe to tell their caseworker about their living condition and the respect they feel or do not feel in their foster placement.

Another right that many youth in foster care do not understand is that they can have a say in whether or not they are medicated. I personally was overmedicated and my foster parents called me "A Living Zombie" because I did not show any emotions while I was on medication. My foster parents knew that this was not right and they later found out that I did not have any disorders, but instead that my mom had medicated me to keep me under control in my past environment. Youth in foster care have a right to open a bank account to save for their future; they have a right to get a job and have their own money.

SB123 is important because foster youth should not have to fear retaliation if they report a complaint. I feel that this bill help foster youth feel safe and protected by the state of Oregon. It is important that foster youth understand that if they file a complaint, they will not be harmed verbally, physically and emotionally or be shamed for bringing up a complaint.

There is another barrier that foster youth face constantly (and to tell you the truth it sometimes get really annoying!). Adults often tell us that we CANNOT do these things, even though they are in fact, legal rights. Now youth often ask themselves "Why can't I?" because they do not know it is their right! They do not know that it is something that they CAN do! Well guess what? THEY CAN! This bill will inform youth of the rights that they have; it will show them that they don't need to feel suppressed; and most importantly, it will show them that these rights are LEGALLY ENFORCED!

You might be wondering why foster youth need a special set of rights. Let me ask a rhetorical question: How difficult or confusing is the foster care system? When a youth comes into foster care they are introduced to at least five new adults who play a different role in their lives. These adults are caseworkers, counselors, lawyers, a citizen review board, and a judge. Now after being placed in care within the first day of their new life they are rushed to court and transferred to a new home that they have never been in before. They have to try to navigate this system all by themselves and they often become confused and lost trying to figure it all out. So let me answer your question of "Why do youth in foster care need a special set of rights?" Because of this complicated system they feel lost and confused and different. When they are told that they cannot see their siblings they may think, "It is because I am a foster child and I am different" instead of "its MY RIGHT to see my sibling and this right is being violated." It is Oregon's job as our parents to make sure that we foster youth are treated with fairness and that foster youth are informed of their rights while in care.

SB123 will also make foster parent's lives easier because it will help them understand the roles that they play in the system and that they play in the child's life. Also, if foster parents knew the rights of foster youth, they could play a role in helping foster youth advocate for their lives. This bill will clear up what youth can and cannot do. This gives powerment to both the foster parents and foster youth.



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All foster youth have a dream. Some may want to become a firefighter, teacher, social worker or counselor. I have a friend that has been in the foster care system for most of his life. He was told that he will not become anything. But now he is going to college to become a lawyer. He has made a great impact on my life because he has shown me that I can do what I want. I would like to become a caseworker for youth in foster care because I want to spend the rest of my life helping others.

“I have a dream” was spoken by a man at a point in time when society was against him; “I have a dream” was spoken by a visionary; “I have a dream” was spoken by a man that was going to accomplish his dream no matter what society said. Now “I have a dream” is being spoken by a simple youth in Oregon’s foster care system that has a goal much like Martin Luther King Jr. and this goal is equal rights for youth in foster care so that they can feel and understand they are equal in society.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

Sincerely,
Cain Stellings