



Oregon
Foster Youth
CONNECTION

MEASURE: SB 123
EXHIBIT: 4
S. HEALTHCARE & HUMAN SERVICES
DATE: 3/21/13 PAGES: 2
SUBMITTED BY: Royce Markley

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Royce Markley. I am a 19-year-old college student and currently still live in foster care. Eight years in the foster care system has given me a valuable experience, an experience that I can use to help others in similar situations. I am an active advocate for foster youth throughout Oregon, and am currently representing Benton County. I am here on behalf of the Oregon Foster Youth Connection legislative committee and on behalf of foster youth throughout the state of Oregon.

I am one of the few fortunate foster youth who was given a brief outline of my basic rights in care. Since entering the system I have almost always had multiple people on my team that were genuinely interested in my wellbeing and success. My team consisted of a caseworker, a court appointed special advocate (CASA), my lawyer, and multiple foster families who also had my best interest at heart.

This being said, I still had many challenging experiences while in care that required me to have a better understanding of my rights than I had. There were many rights I was not aware of such as knowing I have access to a lawyer if I need one, I am able to keep and spend my own money, I can schedule visits and be transported to see my siblings in different homes, and maybe most importantly to my case, knowing that I have the right to make a private complaint!

At the age of sixteen, my brother and I were placed in a new foster home in my hometown of Philomath. Philomath is a small town of about 5,000 people west of Corvallis. We had an unusually family like support system in Philomath and we were both very happy to be home. Unfortunately the home we were placed in was abusive and was not a healthy environment for my brother and I. The situation was difficult because I knew from experience that any I complaints made were going to eventually get back to my foster parents at the time. They were influential members of the community and they were perceived as small town heroes for taking my brother and I into their home. The word spread that we were complaining about our situation and we received a lot of negative attention. The negativity not only came from my foster parents but community members and friends as well.

If SB 123 passes into law, foster youth in the state of Oregon will have a private hotline in which youth can make formal and private complaints. This would not be a whole office dedicated to the hotline for private complaints, but simply one phone, one answering machine, and one helpful tool for foster youth. This is one implication of SB 123 that would be highly beneficial for foster youth and something that could have really benefited me in my own experience.

As wards of the state, we as foster youth depend on the state to provide us with the best care possible. Supporting SB 123 gives foster youth an opportunity to make an often extremely difficult situation a little better. Passing SB 123 empowers youth like me and gives foster youth a sense of control over our own destiny. With your support we can give youth the power to navigate foster care far more effectively, if they chose to, and with your support we can make this difficult situation more manageable.

This bill will have a positive effect on all 13,000 youth who spend time in foster care throughout Oregon. Youth going through the system without the shield of being told their rights are being robbed of precious knowledge. We need to know our rights in order to achieve a level of success that many youth aspire to have and that I'm sure as our guardians, you want us to achieve. Please give us the power of knowledge and support SB 123.

I would like to thank you, and I am happy to answer any of your questions.

Sincerely,
Royce Markley