

To:

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

2013 Oregon Legislative Session

Attention Sen. Alan Bates, Co-Chair and Rep. Nancy Nathanson, Co-Chair

I am Amber Fitts and this is my story:

At 13 my step-father was emotionally and sexually abusing me. My mother didn't believe me.

Out of desperation, I went to the school counselor and told her I wanted to move out and live with someone else. I asked her to call DHS and report my step-father.

I was taken by DHS by the end of the school day.

I started drinking and using Meth in my early teens. I stopped a couple years later.

I finished school and later had 3 children-3 boys.

My oldest son had some really scary behaviors. One evening, he hurt his younger brother. I stayed up all night crying, worrying, and planning my next move. How could I best help my son? Should I tell DHS? What if they took my son?

I called DHS the next morning and asked to open a voluntary case.

2 days later they took my son and placed him with his Father.

After DHS took my son, I started drinking again...and using Meth.

Shortly thereafter, DHS took my other two sons and placed them in Foster Care.

After 2 months, my son's father was charged with child abuse and the boys were all moved Foster Care.

My boys were then placed in 2 more consecutive Foster Placements.

I gave birth to a baby girl. DHS took her from me at the hospital.

At that point I told my caseworker, "I want to change..." and I asked to be placed in residential treatment.

While still in the hospital, my Caseworker initiated a home inspection. I knew there were drugs in my house but I chose not to call my boyfriend to clean up the house before the inspection.

I just let it happen. I knew I needed help, that's why I didn't call.

I decided I was going to do this for me and my kids - not for anyone else. So, I went to treatment with my infant daughter in tow.

I then established suitable housing.

I started working with a Wraparound team and Family Partner.

My sons were returned to me.

My Family Partner met with me, listened to my concerns, and helped me navigate establishing services for my children.

This past fall, DHS closed my case.

"Having a peer support partner made all the difference. She shared her own story and she didn't have to. That made me feel like she really knew what I needed. It was like, "Amber, I've been there too and know what you're going through."

I would like everyone with an open DHS case to have a peer support person-otherwise they're just gonna go back to their old ways.

Because of my experiences, I understand how much Addiction and Mental Health Services can help families like mine. Today, I am here to urge you to fund the budget as presented so more families like mine can get the support they need and be successful.

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