

Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To: House Committee on Rules, 2014 Oregon Legislature
From: Mark McKechnie, Executive Director, Youth, Rights & Justice
Date: February 19, 2014
RE: Concerns and Suggested Changes to HB 4156

Chair Hoyle and Members of the Committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice has represented over 50,000 clients in the juvenile court system since 1975, including children and parents in juvenile dependency cases. We understand the concerns that the Department of Human Services has regarding legal representation for caseworkers at various court hearings, which prompted this bill.

It is common practice in Oregon for DHS workers to appear without an Assistant Attorney General at review hearings and permanency hearings after jurisdiction is established in child dependency cases. DHS typically involves an AAG in complex cases or when the case proceeds to a Termination of Parental Rights petition.

We are concerned that the bill as introduced and amended by the -1 amendments would have statewide consequences that are unintended, undesirable and potentially expensive. We understand that the problem this bill tries to address is really only limited to a very small number of counties.

In a very short timeframe, numerous stakeholders have worked together with DHS to develop amendments designed to meet DHS's goals without the unintended consequences.

We encourage you to pass the -2 amendments that reflect a consensus among key stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.