

**RE: HB 2234 – Testimony February 6, 2015**

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alison Kelley, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer for Liberty House, a child abuse assessment center in Salem serving Marion and Polk Counties.

I submitted written testimony in the form of a letter and an informational handout yesterday.

I would like to make three short points and then would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

1. Child abuse continues to be a BIG problem, both with the scale – the numbers – and the severity of abuse. So much so that in September of 2013, the National Science Foundation released a report stating that it was a public health epidemic and called for a coordinated national strategy.
2. In Oregon, we **have** an effective, coordinated local strategy, but it is unsustainably underfunded.
3. HB 2234 would help by addressing our lack of ability to bill and be reimbursed for all of the services we provide, including the forensic interviews. Centers will only offer a child what is needed, and in many cases a child only needs that interview. It is really a detailed medical social history, overseen by a medical director. But unless the established billing codes of 99499 and related modifiers get put above the line and have value assigned, we can't bill at all. **Those interviews are crucial in stopping the abuse and helping the victims recover, live productive lives, and not have the expensive, extensive physical and mental health negative outcomes such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.**

I understand that some carriers are becoming concerned about the cost. Private carriers only insure about 25% of the 6,000 patients we see in these centers in Oregon each year: 1,500. Using North Dakota's RVU formula ( <https://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/medicalserv/medicaid/docs/cpt/forensic-exam.pdf>) the cost would likely be under \$200 per interview, or at the most, \$375. That low investment will likely generate some savings in the average lifetime costs of \$250,000 for child abuse victims due to the heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and behavioral health needs.

I don't want to sugar-coat the severity of abuse we are seeing on the front lines. At my center alone, we are seeing infants and toddlers who have suffered unthinkable beating, children who have been forcibly sexually assaulted, and increasing numbers of young children forced to watch adult material (conveniently available on tablets) and perform adult acts on perpetrators much larger and stronger.

These children are little. They can't defend themselves. They tell us they can't get the images out of their little minds. I believe the onslaught of abuse will, if unchecked, undermine all that the State of Oregon is trying to accomplish with its Early Learning and other educational objectives. **Your favorable consideration of HB 2234 as amended will improve resources for these critical services and help us help these children.**