

# Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To: House Committee On Human Services and Housing, 2015 Oregon Legislature

From: Mark McKechnie, Executive Director, Youth, Rights & Justice

Date: March 16, 2015

Re: Support for HB 2889 – Savings Accounts for Youth in Foster Care

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Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the Committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice was founded 40 years ago and has been dedicated to providing legal representation and advocacy to over 50,000 children and youth involved in the juvenile court system, including children in foster care and youth in the juvenile justice system. YRJ has also worked extensively with the Legislature, the Oregon Law Commission, various state agencies and other organizations to improve policies and services to the children of Oregon during that time.

YRJ supports HB 2889, which allows foster youth, age 12 and older, to open savings accounts in their own names, without the requirement of a signature by a parent, guardian or other adult, such as a foster parent. This legislation recognizes the unique needs and circumstances of foster youth.

By definition, foster youth are not in the custody of their parents. The interests of foster youth may be adverse to their parents, and it does not make sense to require a parent signature for them to open a bank account. In addition, the other adults in the life of a foster youth can change. Their caseworkers may leave or be transferred, and they are too often moved from one foster placement to another. It only makes sense for them to have bank accounts in their own names.

Unfortunately, foster youth are financially vulnerable. Keeping even small amounts of money in their own names will help them to establish greater financial security. Youth may be entitled to Social Security or other financial benefits or receive funds from inheritances or legal settlements. These funds, as well as any money they earn through their own work, should be protected. We have seen children become victims of identity theft and other types of theft or fraud, including by parents who steal from their own children to support a drug addiction or other illegal activity.

It is important that the Oregon Legislature take this simple, but important step to protect the financial interests of youth in Oregon's foster care system. We urge your support of HB 2889.

An independent, not-for-profit law firm, Est. 1975

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