

ABC House

PO Box 68
Albany, OR 97321
Phone: 541-926-2203
Fax: 541-926-1378
www.abchouse.org

*ABC House is the
Child Abuse
Intervention Center
serving Benton and
Linn Counties.*



Community Partner



NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
ALLIANCE®

ACCREDITED MEMBER

April 27, 2015

Senator Sara Gelser
Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood
Oregon Legislative Assembly
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Written testimony in support of HB 2234

Dear Senator Gelser and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood,

I write today to urge you to support HB 2234, which would bring greater financial sustainability to those who serve our most vulnerable citizens – our children.

I serve as the Executive Director of ABC House, the child abuse intervention center serving Benton and Linn Counties. Our role is to ensure that children at the heart of child abuse investigations are not traumatized by the system designed to protect them. We provide specialized evaluation and support services for children with concerns of child abuse and neglect referred by law enforcement, DHS child welfare and the medical community.

Our core program is the child abuse assessment, which consists of three services that are essential to both the abuse investigation and the child's healing:

- **Medical exams** performed by child abuse experts, who have the specialized training in child abuse medicine to recognize the signs of child abuse and to treat it.
- **Forensic child interviews** conducted by interviewers specially trained in child development, linguistics and child interviewing techniques to obtain objective information from the child in a neutral and child-friendly way.
- **Family support and referral services** by trained advocates who help families cope with the discovery of abuse, provide helpful information and get them connected to other resources needed to heal.

Child abuse assessments help investigators uncover and stop abuse when it is occurring. This not only prevents future abuse to the child being assessed, it also protects other children to whom the abuser has access. Equally important, children being assessed can be connected to crucial aftercare services, such as trauma counseling, to aid the child in healing and break the cycle of re-victimization.

Each 2-3 hour assessment appointment requires approximately 15 hours of staff time before, during and after the appointment itself due to the complexity of these cases. As a result, an assessment costs approximately \$1,700. It is provided at no out-of-pocket cost to the family.

Because of insurance limitations, we are currently permitted to bill insurance only for the medical portion of the assessment, not for the interview or support services, and the medical reimbursement is far too low to be financially sustainable. **We are able to recoup only 29 percent of the total cost of the child abuse assessment.** To cover the remaining cost, centers like ours scramble continuously to raise outside funds through grants, donations and other community support.

HB 2234 as amended would help address this shortfall by requiring the Oregon Health Authority and private insurers to ensure that the costs of child abuse assessments, including forensic interviews and support services, will be billable and reimbursable through additional billing codes or alternative mechanisms. This bill is necessary to improve funding for this critically important service.

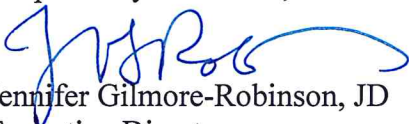
I can think of no more effective illustration of why this funding is necessary than to remind you of a heartbreaking loss from ABC House's own service area, Benton County, the home of Karly Sheehan. Murdered by her mother's boyfriend, three-year-old Karly was the subject of a child welfare investigation during the time leading up to her death but did not have the benefit of a child abuse assessment and was never examined by a child abuse physician. As a result, red flags indicating inflicted abuse went overlooked that would have been recognized by child abuse experts.

It is impossible to say that an assessment would have saved Karly's life; we will never know that. However, it is undeniable that the multidisciplinary expertise of a child abuse assessment gives our community the best possible chance of identifying and stopping abuse when it is occurring.

Every county likely has their own Karly and there are countless more children suffering in silence from abuse and neglect, who are at risk of serious injury and even death. These children need and deserve services to protect them from further harm and help them onto the path toward healing. HB 2234 will help ensure that, until child abuse and neglect ceases to exist, child abuse intervention centers will remain available to serve these most vulnerable children.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Jennifer Gilmore-Robinson, JD
Executive Director