

# Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing, 2016 Oregon Legislature

From: Mark McKechnie, Exec. Director, Youth, Rights & Justice

Date: February 5, 2016

RE: HB 4080 – Establishing an Oregon Governor’s Foster Care Commission

---

Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the Committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice has represented tens of thousands of children in foster care and parents in the child welfare system over the last 41 years. YRJ supports HB 4080 to establish the Governor’s Commission on Foster Care. We want to thank the sponsors for bringing this bill forward at a time that greater accountability for the safety and well-being of children and young adults in Oregon’s foster care system is clearly needed.

We also have some suggestions regarding the implementation of this commission regarding its relationship to the Department of Human Services and other state agencies and to current advisory groups. Youth, Rights & Justice is one of the entities that could be included among the Commission membership. We are also represented on the current Child Welfare Advisory Group (CWAC), and we have been represented on numerous long- and short-term advisory groups related to the child welfare system over multiple decades.

Serious consideration should be given to combining the functions of the CWAC and this commission, while maintaining the position of the commission under the Office of the Governor. Many of the proposed members of the commission are the same types of members who serve on the CWAC currently, but the CWAC lacks the types of authority and oversight invested in the proposed commission. This community input is very valuable to the State of Oregon, but it is a limited resource. The state should use these resources more effectively and efficiently.

In addition, the bill does not outline the fiscal and staffing resources that will be dedicated to make the Commission effective. With the power to “administer oaths, take depositions and issue subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents or other written information necessary to carry out the provisions of... this 2016 Act” and to “compel obedience” if any person fails to comply [Section 4(2)], it will be important to commit sufficient staffing resources and legal counsel to the commission in order to carry out these functions. It is also important that the commission staff be available to carry out and follow up on the requests of the commission for statistical data and other information made to DHS and other agencies.

We believe that these suggestions will help to make the Commission an effective tool for improving Oregon’s foster care system so that it will have the impact intended by the sponsors of HB 4080.

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

401 NE 19TH Ave., Suite 200 • Portland, OR 97232 • (503) 232-2540, F: (503) 231-4767 • youthrightsjustice.org