

March 7, 2017

House Human Services and Housing Committee
Oregon Legislative Assembly

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Sanchez, Vice Chair Olson, and Members of the Committee:

I am Alison Kelley, CEO of Liberty House, a child abuse assessment center serving Marion and Polk Counties. I am also the Chair of the Statewide Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers. There are 21 centers serving 36 counties.

I have submitted written testimony (March 7, 2017) and would refer you to that letter.

I have three short points to make:

1. The reason we have put this bill forward is that the traditional reimbursement rates and algorithms do not come close to covering the costs of child abuse medical assessment and forensic interviews. Notwithstanding the CAMI grants (ORS 418.746) which cover only a fraction of our costs, the gap in funding is left to each center to fill. As nonprofit directors that means we have to use charitable giving mechanisms like auctions and fun runs. Those work better for nonprofits whose missions are a lot more attractive than our grim mission of child abuse assessment. My CEO colleagues and I struggle to communicate the critical nature of our services because discussing rape, beatings, child pornography, commercial sexual exploitation and torture is terribly difficult. In short, it is a lot harder for our centers to raise charitable money. Requiring us to do so is an unsustainable model that creates inequity or inconsistency across the state and puts more children at greater risk of severe injury or death due to lack of access to specialized medical assessment.
2. All of us are worried about the high numbers of children who suffer abuse, neglect, or death from abuse each year in Oregon. Lack of availability of medical providers who specialize in child abuse medicine plays a direct role in our inability as a state to reduce deaths and serious injuries. We can't afford to hire them because the traditional reimbursement rates are so low.
3. I suggest we all need to think differently about child abuse. **It is not just another cause.** Of all the social tragedies facing youth such as suicide, runaways, drug use, poverty, homelessness, youth sexually acting out or raping other youth, and mental illness, there is a high likelihood that abuse or severe neglect is or has been part of that child's life. Of all the high-cost medical conditions in the adult population such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and obesity, childhood trauma and adversity are highly likely to be high on the list of causative factors. Reducing the high costs of those medical conditions will happen when we increase investment in assessment and intervention at the front end.

Stated differently, as a lawyer who has worked on complex public policy issues for a long time, and as a great-granddaughter of an innovative former Governor (Gov. Oswald West, 1911-1915), I suggest we come together as a state with our CCO and private carriers and work to support this amendment so that we can deal effectively with this terrible societal reality. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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