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March 14, 2017

Representative Jeff Barker, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
Oregon Legislative Assembly
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2345

Dear Representative Barker and Members of the Committee:

Child abuse is the most deadly public health emergency facing the State of Oregon.

As your committee considers HB 2345, I respectfully request attention be given to **Section 3(3)**. The purpose of that section is to preserve the ability of local district attorneys to represent the agency in dependency proceedings. I suggest that priority be given to that ability and to supporting the contracts and funding that go with it.

Responding to allegations of child abuse or neglect is extremely challenging. I have worked on complex public policy issues in Oregon for nearly twenty years and in my opinion, the public policy in Oregon that sets forth our expectations of **how** we respond to these types of allegations is strong. **As expressed in ORS 418.747, the local district attorney is responsible for convening and coordinating a multidisciplinary team (MDT) to respond, and that team is required to include all the various professionals who might be involved on any given case.** The reason is that child abuse and neglect investigations are complicated and require professionals to derive accurate meaning from the most nuanced of facts. Not all of the professionals have all of the information, but each might have one piece of information. When the team meets to discuss an investigation, members contribute what they know and thus develop a deeper understanding of the entire context surrounding a child. That is critical to determining the likelihood that abuse is occurring and what is the most appropriate step forward. Decades of research demonstrates that the multidisciplinary approach is the best framework for achieving the best outcomes for the child, the family, and the case. The MDT response connects the criminal and dependency cases and improves case outcomes. Eliminating the role of the district attorney in the dependency representation would undermine that effectiveness.

All of us are worried about the high numbers of children who suffer abuse, neglect, or death from abuse each year in Oregon. As the CEO of Liberty House and the Board Chair of the Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers (ONCAIC), I can attest to the destructive, indeed, catastrophic effects of child neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Child abuse assessment and intervention centers, defined in ORS 418.782(3), play a critical role in the multidisciplinary team response (ORS 418.747) by providing medical assessments, Karly's law assessments (ORS 419B.022-024), forensic interviews, and trauma-informed mental health services. What I have learned is that the coordinated response can literally save lives, and our district attorneys are directly responsible for that coordination. Let's ensure we continue to support that model.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alison S. Kelley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Alison S. Kelley, JD