



Maple Star
oregon

Robin C. Donart, Executive Director

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Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services

Date: March 21, 2017

Dear Co-chairs Senator Steiner-Hayward and Representative Rayfield, and Committee members:

My name is Robin Donart, and I am the Executive Director of Maple Star Oregon, a not-for-profit agency that provides multiple services to youth and families in the Child Welfare system, including therapeutic foster care (TFC). In our TFC program, we serve youth between 6 and 18 years old from anywhere within the state who have a variety of challenges in emotional, behavioral, and mental health. We provide placement, treatment planning, and skill-building services, along with crisis intervention as needed. We also recruit, train, and support our own foster parents. We primarily utilize a home office-based model and as a result, we have both employees and foster parents who are constituents of committee members (particularly in Washington County, Salem, and Albany).

Maple Star has been the largest provider of TFC Behavioral Rehabilitative Services (BRS) in Oregon since 2008 and we are proud of the trauma-informed services that we provide to youth in care. We have seen a definitive increase in the acuity of the needs of the youth referred to us for care, and our focus is on providing a safe and supportive home environment while stabilizing the youth and helping them build the skills they need to be successful once they leave our program. One of the areas we focus on is preventing placement disruptions, which can retraumatize youth, create instability and uncertainty in their lives, delay their academic achievements, and even push them into higher levels of care than necessary. Maple Star has protocols in place to identify youth who are struggling in their placement and possibly at risk of disrupting, and address the challenges those youth are experiencing with additional planning and services as needed. As a result of this practice, we have been able to successfully preserve the placements for 72% of the youth who were identified as struggling in their foster homes, which translates to six youth each month. Preserving those placements provides youth with consistency, builds and maintains healthy relationships, and teaches problem-solving skills. It is also more cost-efficient for the state, in terms of DHS caseworker time and cost of higher levels of care.

The BRS system in Child Welfare has been underfunded for many years, and there has recently been a significant loss of capacity mainly due to providers being unable to continue to bear the brunt of the difference between the BRS rates and actual costs. In addition, increases to the state minimum wage are having and will continue to have an impact on our employee salaries. The Governor's proposed budget included a recommended increase to the BRS rates in order to attempt to keep up with the rising costs of providing care and we strongly support keeping that rate increase in the budget for the next biennium. Adequate rates allow us to ensure we can hire the most qualified employees; provide the greatest amount of support and highest quality services to the youth we serve; attract, train, and support exceptional foster parents; offer more evidence-based services; and reliably track the data showing our positive outcomes. At a time when foster

care and foster children in Oregon are experiencing a crisis, we need to ensure that the system in place to care for and support them is adequately funded.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share my experiences and the outcomes of my organization with you. While we do not have a facility for you to visit, I would be happy to arrange meetings with our employees, foster families, and youth in care in the various regions. Thank you so much for all that you do to support our programs.

Sincerely,



Robin C. Donart
Executive Director
Maple Star Oregon