



**Maple Star**  
oregon

**Robin C. Donart, Executive Director**

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Reference: HB 2903  
House Human Services Committee

Date: April 5, 2017

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Olson, Vice Chair Sanchez 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 Portland, Gresham, Troutdale, and Grants Pass).

Maple Star's mission is to provide quality, effective community-based social services to promote growth and well-being in youth and families. We feel that is essential to provide services in community and home-based settings in order to be trauma informed, culturally sensitive, and to provide services that are individually tailored to each youth's particular needs. It also helps enhance a sense of community and remove barriers and resistance to service provision. 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. We are committed to providing the highest quality services possible using trauma informed and evidence based practices and principles.

Since last year's regulatory changes, there has been a significant reduction in the number of our foster homes. While we have someone dedicated full-time to recruiting new families, we have been unable to keep up with the attrition rate. We are experiencing an alarming number of foster parents who are leaving not only our agency, but who are no longer providing care at all. Due to increases in regulations, expectations, and investigations, foster parents are finding that the benefits of providing foster care are far outweighed by the risks and drawbacks. Those who have experienced an investigation, even when the results are in their favor, are reporting that they are afraid of the impact on their livelihoods, on their families, and on their reputations. They are expressing frustration with the way that investigations are managed and the length of time that they take (during which they may not be able to provide care). Allegations that are screened out are sometimes taking up to three weeks, and we have had multiple families under investigation for over four months only to have the results be inconclusive or not substantiated. There are also issues around follow-up to the investigations; even those whose allegations are not investigated are then subjected to multiple follow-up actions or requests that seem duplicative of what was already completed. There is an overall sense being reported that they feel they are being treated as guilty until proven otherwise. As a result of all of this, there is a significant morale problem

among foster parents. If you ask anyone involved in foster care, they will tell you that the greatest resource for recruiting new foster parents are your current foster parents. Our foster parents (and I have heard the same directly from other providers and DHS foster parents as well) are unwilling to recommend providing foster care to others because of the current environment. Paired with the fact that our system is significantly underfunded and therefore we have difficulty hiring and training qualified employees as well as recruiting and retaining skilled and experienced foster parents, we find that we are no longer able to meet the needs of as many youth as we would like to. This lack of capacity is a significant safety issue for children in foster care in Oregon.

HB 2903 focuses on three critical actions that will improve child safety outcomes:

- Increases strategies available to the DHS to address child safety and accountability.
- Creates prioritization, or triage, for the most concerning events.
- Builds greater competency for sustaining safe environments in provider organizations.

Please support HB 2903, as we need these tools to attain safety goals. I sincerely appreciate you hearing the bill. Thank you so much for all that you do to support our programs.

Sincerely,



Robin C. Donart  
Executive Director  
Maple Star Oregon