



**Boys &
Girls Aid**

January 27, 2017

Senate Human Services Committee Chair Senator Gelser and Committee Members,

First, thank you all for your commitment to public service and to the children and families of Oregon. Your work is very much appreciated.

Boys & Girls Aid was Oregon's first child welfare organization. The agency's core purpose is to impact the well-being of children in need. We work to strengthen the roles of adults in the lives of children, provide safe, stable living environments, and advocate for the needs of Oregon's most vulnerable children. The programs working toward these goals are infant and foster care adoption, options counseling, foster care for teens in the state and juvenile justices systems, and shelter and long-term housing for homeless and runaway youth.

The agency currently provides shelter and therapeutic foster care services for youth ages 10 - 18 in the custody of the Department of Human Services and Juvenile Departments. The youth come to us in crisis and extremely traumatized and we work to provide them emotional and physical safety. Unfortunately, the youth in these services have been negatively impacted by the unintended consequences of SB1515.

We understand your committee will be considering Senate Bills 243, 244, 245, 246, and 636. We are concerned that without enough time for us all to work together on these bills, we will have more unintended negative consequences. Please see the attached information on our position on these bills and our amendments to make child safety more achievable.

As a result of SB1515, we have had youth moved abruptly from homes in which they felt safe and secure due to what was ultimately found to be unfounded allegations. Those youth have then been placed in temporary housing options for weeks and in



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some cases months waiting for investigations to be resolved, which added to their trauma. The line between intentional abuse and neglect has become indistinguishable from simple errors made by professionals, who have nothing but positive intent. This environment has made it extremely difficult to recruit retain high qualify staff and foster parents. While serving, they live in fear that making a simple mistake or being falsely accused of wrong doing.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you to ensure the safety of children in Oregon.

Respectfully,

Vera Stoulil
Chief Operating Officer