

Dear Senate Committee on Human Services, Chair Gelser and Committee Members:

Thanks for the opportunity to provide you testimony. I appreciate the efforts of Senator Gelser and this committee to address child safety in our community.

I understand the bills you are hearing today may address some of the concerns about program challenges caused by implementation of Senate Bill 1515. I support any improvements these bills may bring. Please refer to the amendments recommended by the Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs.

I started my career as a front line child care worker working with high acuity children. I now oversee an agency that provides, among other services, residential and shelter programs to some of the most vulnerable and challenging youth in our state. These first line worker positions have always been filled with energetic, dedicated, mostly young staff learning, growing, making occasional mistakes and improving their skills. They often move on to other positions and careers in our field.

Yet the environment now has some of tomorrow's best potential leaders in behavioral health care leaving the field, fearful that a mistake could disrupt or ruin their career.

Don't be confused, I am not apologizing for nor protecting incompetent or dangerous employees who occasionally end up in any helping profession. I am the first to fire any staff that aren't protecting our children. But the current legal, investigative and punitive approach to most any reported problem in service delivery is an over-reach that does not improve child safety, and sometimes harms child safety by taking trusted, protective servants away from them.

Looking Glass had to close an extremely valuable program serving high acuity youth and their families. This was due to lack of adequate funding and unfunded regulatory requirements (Please see attached letter). We are currently desperately trying to maintain our other residential services.

Looking Glass recently opened a shelter to help child welfare children be safely cared for and properly transitioned, rather than staying in hotel rooms or offices. Yet in addition to being underpaid, the staff are concerned about making simple mistakes that could ruin their career. It is difficult to keep staff and the program is running a deficit. Its future is in jeopardy.

The foster care, shelter and residential treatment services in our state are in a crisis. We really need strong support, resources, and regulatory relief. We need effective partnership with the Department of Human Services, Oregon Youth Authority, Oregon Health Authority and our elected officials. We must pull together to move from program closures and bare survival to a safe thriving therapeutic system. Our children, youth and families need us!

Thank you for your work on this.

Sincerely,

**Craig Opperman
President / CEO
Looking Glass Community Services**