



ALBERTINA
KERR

**Senate Committee on Human Services
Public Hearing 2/1/17**

**Testimony on SB 244 and SB 636
Jeff Carr, CEO, Albertina Kerr Centers**

As a member of the Oregon Alliance for Children's Programs, we support both SB 244 and SB 636 with the amendments provided by OACP to the Committee. Thank you for letting us tell you our story and provide you with our input.

Albertina Kerr Centers was established in 1907 and has been strengthening Oregon families and communities for nearly 110 years. Throughout our history we have focused on serving the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our community. Today, we provide programs and services to children and adults with developmental disabilities and mental health challenges.

We operate 48 group homes and day services for children and adults with developmental disabilities throughout Western Oregon. Nearly 60% of all the children in the State of Oregon who have a developmental disability and behavioral challenges requiring a group home setting, live in an Albertina Kerr home. We also operate a 10-acre campus dedicated to Children's Mental Health in Gresham that has a 24 bed subacute children's psychiatric facility where 80-85% of the children who are admitted are referred by hospital emergency rooms throughout the State, due to their attempt to harm themselves or someone else.

Albertina Kerr employs over 800 people, of which 500 are frontline staff who make between \$11-\$14 per hour. They are the people who are supporting children and adults who have significant behavioral issues in both our DD group homes and our subacute facility. Since arriving 7 months ago I have met staff who have experienced physical injury and aggression from children they support. These are complex children with intense support needs. This is not sustainable, does not entice quality employees to work in this field, and we are seeing the effects of the workforce shortage now.

These employees are committed to providing high quality services to the people they support, while also struggling financially to provide for their own families due to the rates paid by the State of Oregon.

Despite our rigorous training and mentoring of staff, occasionally some make mistakes. And at Kerr, we emphasize to all our employees that any suspected abuse and neglect is reported. I'm proud to say that due to our culture of transparency and reporting enforcement at Kerr, over 50% of all the reports of inappropriate behavior get screened by DHS and they determine these don't warrant opening an investigation.

I think one of the biggest challenges over all the statutory, rule, and implementation changes this past year is on **penalizing mistakes, rather than building competency in direct care and frontline staff so we can help them continually improve their performance and ensure quality outcomes for those they support.** Closing programs and firing staff doesn't build a safer, higher performing network of services that can ensure there is a safety net for these vulnerable children. We understand that there is a sacred trust that we as an organization have been given in caring for the welfare of these children, and we are committed to honoring that trust and helping the State of Oregon ensure that it has a social safety net that is worthy of our values as Oregonians.

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