

**School of Social Work**

Post Office Box 751  
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751  
1800 SW 6th Avenue ASRC 600  
Portland, Oregon 97201

503-725-4712 tel  
503-725-5545 fax  
www.pdx.edu/ssw

House Committee on Human Services and Housing, 2017 Oregon Legislature

February 8, 2017

**re: support for HB 2216 Sibling Bill of Rights**

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you to share my support for HB 2216. I'm writing as someone with experience studying and writing about the transition out of foster care, as an adult supporter for youth advocacy, and as a foster and adoptive parent.

In my research with young people aging out of care (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013), separation from siblings was one of the most salient issues for current and former foster youth. Sometimes separation was permanent, often when younger siblings were placed for adoption. At other times sibling visitation was simply not made a priority and relationships grew more strained, leaving one youth to note that her much younger siblings would "probably not recognize her if they passed her on the street one day." Out of all the losses these current and former foster youth carried, separation from siblings hurt the most.

My work interviewing current and former foster youth grew out of experiences with a local Independent Living program and youth advocacy through the Mockingbird Society. As an adult support staff I witnessed many youth sharing similar stories with lawmakers in Olympia eight years ago in support of legislation to support sibling relationships. I was reminded of these stories this Monday when I went to Salem as an adult support for Oregon Foster Youth Connection and once again heard youth asking to be kept in touch with their siblings.

Finally, the effort to keep siblings together is important to me as a former foster parent and adoptive parent. As a parent I became intimately familiar with the losses my children experienced prior to, during, and after their adoption, and I feel great relief that separation from each other was not something they had to endure. I also fostered an additional sibling pair and while there were challenges they presented together, I am convinced it was much better for us to care for them together in our home. Today as young adults they have remained important supports to each other, providing stability their parents cannot give.

In short, I encourage you to support HB 2216.



Miranda Cunningham, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Practice, Child and Family Studies | School of Social Work