

TESTIMONY OF Keva M. Miller, PhD, LCSW, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Portland State University, before the House Judiciary Committee, February 14, 2018

Chairman Barker and Representatives of the Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to review my testimony in support of House Bill 4009.

My name is **Keva Miller and I am a researcher, professor, and administrator in the School of Social Work at Portland State University.** I have been working with and conducting research on children and families with child welfare and criminal justice involvement for over 20 years. I am well aware of the challenges child welfare professionals face as they strive to keep children safe while promoting family-centered services. I am also keenly aware of the barriers child welfare policies and practices have on families. One of the greatest challenges is system practices that inadequately support family efforts to maintain connections. For families with child welfare and criminal justice system involvement, the barriers are even greater due to dual system policies and practices that ineffectively support maintaining, re-building, or building healthy relationships. While all families benefit from greater attention and efforts to keep them together, families of color are impacted disproportionately and disparately. As a result, parent-child separation can have a devastating effect on children's emotional, psychological, and behavioral well-being. Often, the impact is long-term and can lead to enduring trauma over a lifetime. I believe that House Bill 4009 is designed to improve the overall well-being for these families.

Many would agree that the governmental agencies are not designed to be permanent parents. We know that children who grow up in foster care have increased likelihoods of poorer outcomes throughout life compared to their counterparts. Yet, historically Oregon has one of the highest foster care placement rates in the country with Black/African American and Native American children entering foster care disproportionate to their rates in the general population and remaining in foster care at a disparate rate compared to White children. Furthermore, children of color are least likely to be adopted. When we factor in removal due to parental incarceration or other criminal justice involvement, children become at an increased risk for remaining in the foster care for unreasonable extended periods. One factor is unreasonable timelines for caseworkers in the child welfare system and the rare instances, caseworkers/counselors in the criminal justice systems, to work with parents to resolve conditions or behaviors that led to their children's removal. Over the years, I have heard many incarcerated women express a need for child welfare to consider parents' efforts to resolve issues, the length of time given to address concerns, and mandated timelines for their children's removal.

Many incarcerated parents are capable caregivers and would provide healthy and appropriate parenting upon release. They require system assistance, specifically reasonable timelines, to be given an opportunity to parent upon release. We know this to be true for parents who are fortunate to have relatives willing to provide temporary care during periods of incarceration. It is important that consideration be given to parents and their children who lack such family support.

Chairman Barker and members of the committee, once again, I thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. I strongly urge you to support House Bill 4009.

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