

# YWCA IS ON A MISSION

February 14, 2018

Representative Jeff Barker, Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary  
Oregon State Legislature

Dear Chair Barker and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this letter in support of HB 4009, addressing much needed reforms in our State's Child Welfare system.

The YWCA of Greater Portland's Family Preservation Project has provided services at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility since 2003. Specifically, FPP works to create the best outcomes for families impacted by parental incarceration. Much of our work is done at the intersection of our criminal justice and child welfare systems.

### **Pathways in to Foster Care:**

Many of the children we have worked with over the past fifteen years have been involved with the child welfare system. Though placed in care for their own safety and well-being, the removal from family and having to change schools is yet another traumatic event for these children. A young boy who is currently a client of our program has been in nine placements, attended six schools, and has had limited contact with his siblings since being removed from his family care placement less than one year ago. We need to be sure, to the extent possible, that our remedy does not cause more trauma to children than the original harm. We need to reserve the removal of children from family for instances of true, imminent danger.

### **Pathways out of Foster Care:**

Incarcerated mothers whose children are placed in foster care are racing against the clock in an uphill battle. As the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) stipulates that when a child is in care for fifteen out of twenty-two months, the state must move towards a permanent plan. At a minimum, a parent in state custody will serve thirteen months and they have likely served some time in county jail prior to going to prison. While incarcerated, parents do have opportunities to fulfill the requirements of the action plan generated by the agency and to address many of the conditions that brought their children into care. However, despite their efforts and progress, the condition of their confinement/lack of ability to parent often precludes them from being considered as a viable resource for their children.

Over the past fifteen years of working with incarcerated mothers and their children and families, I have seen parents make long-lasting and monumental shifts in their approach to their children and their own parenting. Too often, I have seen those changes occur too late per the ASFA timelines, resulting in the irrevocable termination of parental rights.

It is critical to create a mechanism for the courts to reinstate parental rights if a parent's circumstances have changed significantly, and it is clearly in the best interest of the children to return to their care. Please support HB 4009.

Thank you,



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