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Governor



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Letter in Support of HB 4009A
February 27, 2018
Senate Committee on Human Services

Chair Senator Gelsler, Vice-Chair Senator Knopp, and Senators Linthicum, Monnes Anderson, and Wagner:

The Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), in its role of advocate for the women and girls of Oregon, strongly supports HB 4009A. With the -3 amendments, HB 4009A allows for the exit of children out of the foster care system and safe return to their parents whose parental rights had previously been terminated. We are joining our support with the Oregon Commissions on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, Black Affairs, and Hispanic Affairs all of which have reviewed the bill and approve this testimony.

Despite the stated intentions that the laws of our child welfare system are centered around the best interest of children, the data, the stories of families involved, and experts in this field illustrate a different reality for some and indicate that changes are needed.

Currently, the laws do not allow for a child to be returned to a parent who has lost parental rights, even when the child has not been adopted and the parent has made significant positive and restorative life changes – when the decision to terminate parental rights is no longer in the best interest of the child. This results in some children remaining unnecessarily in the foster care system, without again having a legal family, and then aging out of the system alone. This situation is gravely concerning, but of even greater concern because of the overrepresentation of children and families of color in the child welfare system. Oregon's rates of racial disproportionality in the system are above national averages. More specifically, American Indian/Alaska Native and African American/Black children are remarkably overrepresented in Oregon's foster care system and in the population of the children who age out of the system.

Moreover, this lack of opportunity for reunification after parental rights have been terminated eliminates a biological parent's hope to parent their child again and, therefore, motivation to make difficult changes that are a benefit to themselves, their families, and our communities.

HB 4009, with the -3 amendments, allows for a parent's rights to be reinstated when the parent's conduct and conditions that led to the termination of parental rights have been ameliorated, the parent is presently fit, and reinstatement of rights is in the best interest of the child. The -3 amendments include provisions that safeguard against misuse of this opportunity.

OR Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

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We recognize that this change is expected to affect only about ten children per year in Oregon, where more than 1,700 children are waiting to be adopted. But, we strongly feel that this is an important step toward decreasing the number of children who unnecessarily remain in the system and of great significance to strengthening families in our communities. By passing HB 4009, Oregon will join sixteen other states that have created similar opportunities for reunification and paths to permanency.

The Oregon Commission for Women strongly supports HB 4009. We also support an interim workgroup to address the issues of Oregon's standard for removal of children from their parents' care, which was addressed in HB 4009 as introduced. We believe this is a critical aspect of the system that needs change.



Julia Yoshimoto, member
Oregon Commission for Women



Chanpone Sinlapasai, Chair,
Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific
Islander Affairs



Alberto Moreno, Chair,
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James Morris, Chair
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