



June 22, 2020

Joint Committee on the First Special Session of 2020
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Chair Kotek, Co-Vice Chair Girod, Co-Vice Chair Drazan, and Members of the Committee:

In 2020, after working in partnership for three years, Children First for Oregon (CFFO) and The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon (CTFO) merged to form **Our Children Oregon (OCO)**. OCO's mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We elevate data and the voices of communities to amplify the need and collaboratively develop policy and public investments to improve overall child and family well-being across the state. We continue to convene the Children's Agenda, a partnership of 120 organizations, looking at the holistic needs of children.

As you prepare to move into a special session, to address the critical issues facing our state as we respond to COVID-19 and the systemic racism inherent in our police systems, we focus our testimony today on the legislative concepts that are either directly related to COVID-19 response or are critical issues remaining from the 2020 Regular Session, which have been posted for the June 22nd hearing.

Most of the issues being addressed through the Legislative Concepts under consideration are not new. Prior to COVID, challenges existed around economic stability, housing, child safety, and the lack of disaggregated healthcare data; COVID has spotlighted these issues.

LC 39 - Broadband

As with many of the inequitable elements of our systems and infrastructure, unequal access to broadband, especially in rural areas of our state, has become increasingly more visible during the pandemic. As schools went virtual this spring, what that could look like was very different around the state depending on internet access. In Oregon, state data from the U.S. Census Pulse Survey (May 21-May 26th, 2020) reflected that of all respondent households with children, about 8 in 10 reported having reliable access to both a device (80%) and internet (77%) for educational purposes. Lack of broadband access likely contributes to these data. Broadband infrastructure can be a key element of economic recovery in rural areas and is a need that has been ignored for too long.

Issues within COVID-19 Response Omnibus Bills

LC 45 and LC 84 have a number of essential sections to support Oregon's families and children.

- The **Eviction Moratorium** in LC 45 (also posted as LC 90) is essential to address the concern of many families about what happens when rent comes due on July 1. We are all living in very uncertain times, and every Oregon child deserves a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home. We all need a place to shelter and stay safe with ourselves and our families. Housing stability has never been more important than during this pandemic. **We ask that you enact a strong eviction moratorium and repayment period that will prevent people from losing their homes.**
- Establishment of the **Low-Income Utility Payment Fund** (included in LC 45 and LC 84) to help low-income families with utility bill assistance, is important to help with economic stability. The proposed changes around **Individual Development Account (IDA) flexibility** (included in LC 45 and LC 84) would establish a savings category for emergency expenses to promote financial stability and to protect existing assets. It would also clarify some language around the repayment of funds taken out for an emergency by making guidelines less punitive. This would allow IDA savers to have their own funds matched with Initiative dollars to respond to critical financial needs during a period of financial hardship such as unemployment, medical leave, or economic downturn.
- COVID-19 has elevated the need for timely disaggregated health data, and we are glad to see the proposed language around **Race and Ethnicity Data Collection for COVID-19 testing** (included in LC 45 and LC 84). Given the large race/ethnicity disparities reported by the [Oregonian last week](#) showing that "with 145 new cases among Black, indigenous and people of color and 57 among Whites. That roughly 70/30 split in new cases is the opposite of the county's population, which is roughly 70% White and 30% people of color. Latinx residents account for about 11% of the county's population but 33% of its cases," it is critical that we require the collection of race and ethnicity data.

LC 51 - Out-of-State Placement of Foster Youth and Family First

This concept brings back legislation from the 2020 session to put stronger parameters around out-of-state placement of foster youth. We have been pleased to see the significant decrease in the number of children and youth being placed at out-of-state facilities and support the proposed language increasing licensing and other requirements. Delaying the implementation of the placement of children in qualified residential treatment programs to December 1, 2020, under the federal Family First Prevention Services Act is reasonable, especially in light of COVID-19.

Some of these proposed changes are significant changes to what we have known as "normal" or "business as usual." As you consider legislation during this upcoming Special Session, we urge you to be open to what is possible in regards to COVID-19 responses, because we shouldn't be thinking about going back to normal. Our pre-COVID normal was not working for too many of our children, and we

should use this opportunity to do better. As James Baldwin wrote in the early 1960s, “In our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least one can demand.” Please remember this when told something is impossible or can’t be done. We ask you at this moment to center the children of Oregon and to make the best decisions to ensure an equitable recovery, even if it seems impossible.

Let’s reimagine the world we want to live in and make it real with each decision we make!

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

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