



"Support for new beginnings and healthy families."

March 7, 2019

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Heard, and Members of the Committee,

Re: SB 745

My name is Natalie Wood, and I am the Executive Director of Kinship House – a non-profit organization that strives to meet the mental health needs of children transitioning out of foster care and into permanency. I have spent over twenty years working with youth involved in the foster care system, and have seen first-hand the many barriers that foster care alumni face as they move toward independence. While our aim at Kinship House is to provide the services that children need to thrive in a healthy, stable home, sadly that is often no longer an option for youth aging out. As a community we are responsible for meeting the needs of those youth who we have consistently failed.

All young people need to learn how to budget, obtain a driver's license, successfully complete high school, rent their first apartment, find employment, apply to college, and more. But many foster youth are moved multiple times while in foster care — over half of all youth in care in Oregon experience more than 3 placements. This instability makes it difficult for foster families to teach these necessary skills to youth. Moreover, 3 out of 4 young people in Oregon age out of foster care without being reunited or connected to a family. These youth lack critical supports that can make the difference between finding an apartment or not having a home to sleep in at night.

Children in foster care are our children — it's our responsibility to help them learn the skills needed to succeed as adults. That's why we support SB 745. This bill would expand transition services so that *all* youth in care get the support they need to live independently.

SB 745 invests in Oregon's Independent Living Program (ILP) — a key resource for gaining the skills all young adults need. Not only are youth provided with a case manager that is able to work individually with them to gain the needed skills for independence, the youth are also able to build a network of support among their peers, something that is difficult to come by for many. If passed as amended, SB 745 would also increase the age for eligibility for ILP from 16-21 to 14-23, allowing more youth to be served.

It's time to ensure that all foster youth in Oregon are prepared to transition out of foster care and become successful adults. For these reasons, Kinship House urges your support of SB 745.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this legislation.

Natalie Wood, MSW
Executive Director
Kinship House