

## Testimony in Support of SB 745

Thank you Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Heard, and Members of the committee for allowing me to take your time to hear my testimony about the bill SB-745, for the expansion of more funds which can help expand the age for eligibility for Independent Living Programs to serve youth ages 14 to 23 so that more foster youth can learn the skills needed for a successful transition out of foster care. I would like to share with you my time in the Independent Living Program (ILP) within the foster system and what this bill could do for the future of ILP.

My name is Justin Bliven and I'm 24 years of age and I have spent 13 years within the foster care system. I first was placed into foster care at the age of 5 and stayed in the system for the next 13 years until I aged out. I currently live in Prineville, Oregon however I have lived in Portland, Dallas, Salem, Grants Pass, Eugene and Keizer, which included Polk County, Marion County, Lane County, Josephine County, Multnomah County and Benton County. I had moved around so much that I received and attended different programs including ILP for which I am here to talk about.

In my later teenage years I was problematic with maintaining relationships that were there to support me. I did not have the self confidence or the tools at the time to see myself succeed which resulted in unnecessary behaviors. Although I did learn that I could succeed but only by my mistakes and triumphs.

When I was 19, I entered a transitional housing program that offered housing for current and former foster youth and while I was living there they offered ILP skill building services as well and I was assigned an ILP worker and offered a variety of classes. At that time the program offered classes such as money management, cooking and general knowledge of college preparedness. Burning water was a speciality of mine, and I was an expert at magically making the money in my bank account disappear... only kidding.

However, it was a new concept to me and to have that kind of freedom that it had given me, it was like a blind man seeing for the first time. The resources and the support that was given in the transitional housing from ILP services was phenomenal, unfortunately I could not continue the resources and the support they had given me because it had closed down due to the lack of funding.

Sadly, when the program closed, so did the ILP resources and classes that were offered there as well. Fortunately I had a place to go when the transitional housing closed down, but I was more concerned for where the other youth would go for resources.

I was not able to apply all the skills I was taught within the transitional housing, like college preparedness, because I moved back home to be there for family, however if this bill were in place when I was in care I am positive I would have surely been able to apply the skills they had taught me, earlier rather than later. I am now using all of the skills I have been taught from those resources and tools they offered through ILP, however if this bill were to be passed youth would have the chance to apply and grow the skills they were taught.

*Just to recap the bill will:*

- *SB 745 requires case plans to include in-person meetings explaining available transition services and includes a report for the Legislature to track outreach to eligible youth and use of ILP services.*
- *SB 745 intends to make ILP services available to youth in residential treatment centers*
- *SB 745 will be **amended** it would expand the age for eligibility for ILP to serve youth ages 14 up until their 23rd birthday.*
- *SB 745 may be **amended** to clarify some of the details in the reporting requirement (Section 2)*

*There are a lot of opportunities for youth, but this will allow youth to figure things out on their own, with the help and resources given to them from ILP services. Youth need the right people, tools, and resources to help carve their own path to success.*

If this bill, SB 745, were to get passed, it would definitely be a gift because it would help current ILP youth as well as their workers to ensure their success with the resources and tools that they didn't have before.

This bill could truly shape the future of Oregon, because the *youth* who reside in the beautiful state we call home are who make the future of Oregon brighter! Youth will undoubtedly become lawyers, doctors, and even Representatives and Senators. By coming here today, in front of this committee, we are showing that by allowing yourself the courage to take the first steps toward change you will set yourself up for success.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my testimony and listening to my story.