

NEW AVENUES for Youth

March 12, 2019

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

RE: Senate Bill 745

My name is Megan Glines, and I'm the Director of Foster Care Transition Services at New Avenues for Youth, a nonprofit in Portland that is dedicated to the prevention and intervention of youth homelessness. I reside in Multnomah County.

Foster-care transition services are a key component of our homelessness-prevention efforts, and for good reason: data show that a large percentage of young people exiting care at 21 will find themselves homeless shortly thereafter—a reality we see every day in the large number of foster-care alumni engaged in the organization's homelessness-intervention services. For the past five years, New Avenues has held the largest Independent Living Program—or ILP—contract in the state, serving approximately 180 youth in foster care every month. In that time, we've seen the important role that Independent Living Programs play in helping youth ages 16-20 to transition from foster care into adulthood. These programs address crucial needs in life skills development like, personal finance, drug and alcohol recovery and mental-health supports, education planning, job training and placement, and more.

DHS recognizes that extra support is needed for the youth they care for which is why they began contracting with providers, like New Avenues, to offer individualized services that address the unique goals and needs of youth in transition. Independent Living Programs can also support youth in any number of housing situations, including those living independently or in facilities, and can offer continuity of service when youth move, which is common for those in foster care. Senate Bill 745 provides necessary funding for ILPs throughout Oregon to deliver these crucial services.

This bill also extends the age range of youth and young adults eligible for this service from the current age range of 16-20 years and expands it to 14-23 years old. As an Independent Living Program provider these last five years, we are keenly aware that giving youth more time to cultivate and work towards their goals, increases the potential for a successful transition to adulthood.

When this bill passes, ILPs, like New Avenues, will be able to reach youth in foster care earlier, supporting them as they enter high school; helping them build skills, connections, and social capital along the way; and positioning them for long-term success. The bill will also allow these types of programs to support young people who have already exited foster care and still need support—especially around mental health, education, employment, navigating government systems, and more. Essentially, it will prevent them from abruptly losing all DHS services as soon as their case is closed—a current circumstance that puts them at even greater risk of homelessness.

Finally, New Avenues for Youth and many other providers must currently fundraise private dollars to fully fund Independent Living Programs to meet the needs of all youth. In Fiscal Year 2019, 23% of the Independent Living Program expenses at New Avenues will be covered by private fundraised dollars. These fundraising efforts are required to deliver services as outlined by the contract as it stands. By increasing funding, agencies will be able to use private fundraised dollars to provide innovative services tailored to the needs of a variety of youth populations, rather than operating under a model that is one size fits all. I urge you to support Senate Bill 745 to fulfill the promise made to youth in care to provide them with the opportunity to grow and flourish. Thank you for your time.



Megan Glines, MSW
Foster Care Transition Services Director
New Avenues for Youth

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