

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2019

Dear Senator Gelsler:

I want to thank you and your team for your unwavering dedication in pushing to ensure Oregon is prepared to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act on October 1, 2019. I spent a great deal of time working to enact Family First. My work was guided by the many conversations I and my staff have had with foster youth, families and advocates in order to respond to the tragic stories we have seen all too often on the front page of Oregon newspapers.

It is time for fundamental changes to be made to the way the federal government pays for child welfare so that we can support effective programs to help families stay together. The alternative, taking children away and sending them into the foster care system, is clearly an inferior option in many cases.

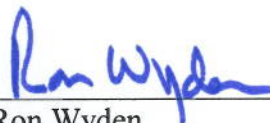
Family First allows the child welfare system to better serve vulnerable children in Oregon and across the country, but it can only achieve this goal if state legislatures are willing to take the necessary steps forward to meet the law's requirements. It is a two-step process. States need to transition their systems away from congregate care to operate Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs). Once this happens, the new Family First funding stream for evidence-based prevention services will be at a state's disposal. Ensuring Oregon has access to these critical prevention services funds is a huge priority.

Today, I am so pleased that the Oregon state legislature is taking this step forward by considering the proposed amendments to Senate Bill 825. You are actively shifting Oregon's foster care system towards QRTPs, and with that shift, will open the door to essential funding for in-home parenting programs, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment.

I know that the process of getting ready to implement Family First is not easy. All vulnerable children in Oregon should be able to benefit and will benefit from your hard work and care.

Thank you for your tireless efforts to support Oregon foster youth. I look forward to continue to work with you as you move towards implementation of Family First.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee