

Chairperson and members of the committee.

I am Vera Stoulil, Chief Operating Officer of Boys and Girls Aid. We provide a wide spectrum of services for kids in the custody of child welfare that includes shelter, therapeutic foster care, and residential services. We also work with families to prepare them for the journey of adopting children from foster care and work with children to process their grief and trauma and prepare for permanency with a family. Our managers of our adoption and permanency services were not able to be here today, so I am sharing their experience and perspective today.

Our staff work with 160 of Oregon's foster youth, none of whom have a permanent family. Most of these youth have been in the system for several years and many have experienced disrupted adoptions. 5 of these children are currently being served out of state, causing the work we have been doing with them to be disrupted.

We also work with 80 families annually that want to provide a family for these kids

We are all too aware of the challenges that youth who have experienced trauma face. These youth not only lack secure attachments with a trusted caregiver, they lack appropriate models for safety and consistency, and they lack the coping skills to deal with their living experience. All of this can lead to behavioral issues that result in the youth being labeled as "hard to place" or "unadoptable" and without the work of highly skilled and trained staff, their chances of finding a permanent home are bleak.

Helping these kids heal and find permanent connections, can only be done through the assistance of highly skilled and trained staff. However, acquiring staff

with this skill set, while paying them a **wage that far undervalues their skills**, only leads to burnout, turnover and another loss for the children whom they serve.

Our staff are asked to do what often feels impossible: find a family willing to adopt a child with high behavioral needs, help a youth process their grief and trauma, instill hope in a foster child who has only known loss and disappointment.

We have seen this work take a toll on our staff. They have high expectations of what they hope to accomplish and they want to do right by these kids. Our staff love what they do, but many of them struggle to stay in their positions at the current wages that we can offer. Even for those with a graduate degree, it's often not financially sustainable to stay in these positions long term. Some of the staff are single parents. Others are having to find other sources of income in order to continue doing this work. We have seen qualified employees decide to leave not because they don't love their job, but because they can't afford to continue doing it. And every time there's turnover, it results in another loss and disruption for the kids we serve.

The foster children in our state need and deserve qualified service professionals who are committed to their success. This means staff who are fairly compensated, supported and have the tools they need to be a consistent agent of change and hope in the lives of these children.

We urge you to support HB3208 to ensure that Oregon's most vulnerable children get what every child deserves, the opportunity to grow into healthy, thriving adults, and to break the cycle.

Thank you.