

3-20-19

HB 3208

To: Committee on Human Services & Housing

My name is Sarah Kopplin and I oversee Boys and Girls Aid's permanency services department. I supervise 10 employees and the staff on my team work directly with around 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. My 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.

There are successes, and while those can bring fulfillment I have seen the way this work takes its toll on my staff. They have high expectations of what they hope to accomplish and they want to do right by these kids. Most of my 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 on my team are single parents. Others are having to find other sources of income in order to continue doing this work. I 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 they 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.