

April 2, 2019  
Marissa Johnson  
Facilitator, Foster Homes of Healing  
Senate Bill 825-2



Good Afternoon Chair Gelsers and Members of the Committee,

For the record my name is Marissa Johnson and I am a former foster parent to a high acuity special needs kiddo, and an ongoing chosen mom. I also have the honor of serving as the facilitator of the Foster Homes of Healing Coalition which is a twelve member coalition with the primary purpose of elevating the quality of foster care through legislative advocacy. I also serve as a member of the Families First Prevention Services Act Workgroup.

Today I testify in support of SB 825-2 because I believe it makes good sense to bring the state of Oregon into alignment with the Families First Act. But more significantly, I testify before you because three years ago my foster daughter was placed out of state in a situation which did not meet adequate standards. As a result of that inadequate placement she is living out of state as a houseless 20 year old woman. She is moving from place to place with untreated mental illness.

My kiddo's untenable situation provides an example of two significant challenges we face here in Oregon. First, either we do not have enough critical and acute placements available in the state of Oregon to meet the acute needs of children here, or we do not know of available placements in state when a critical situation arises and one is needed immediately. When our family was in crisis and my girl's behavior was no-longer safe in our home, I was told there was not a place for her to stabilize in Oregon and return to my care.

Second, there were not adequate standards to ensure that the placement she was shifting to was safe or adequate for her needs. Because the care she received was inadequate, her condition worsened and within the year, once she was eighteen, she made the decision to remove herself from the system.

Senate Bill 825-2 is not a solution to every challenge facing Oregon's dependency system, but it begins to move Oregon toward providing accredited placements in state, and holding the state accountable for the conditions of placements made outside of Oregon.

In addition to my support of SB 825-2, I would assert that Oregon needs to become much better at providing the right placement at the right time. I know that the DHS research department, ORRAI - Office of Reports, Research, Analytics, and Implementation has been conducting an exhaustive research project to determine the optimum mix of placements for dependent children in Oregon. Whether the number of acute placements available for kiddos in Oregon is sufficient or not, I would urge chair Gelser and members of the committee to invite ORRAI to discuss the availability, and awareness of availability of QRTP placements in Oregon, so that no other young woman has to endure the trauma of inadequate care as my daughter did.