

Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Oregon Senate
Committee on Human Services
Testimony for Senate Bill 825
April 2, 2019

Chair Gelsler, Vice-Chair Heard, and Senators of the Committee, Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ) would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding SB 825 and the amendments.

Founded in 1975, Youth, Rights & Justice is a non-profit law firm located in Portland, Oregon, that provides client-centered legal representation for children, youth, and parents in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Youth, Rights & Justice also represents children, youth, and parents in delinquency and dependency cases heard by the Oregon Court of Appeals and Oregon Supreme Court, in addition to staffing an educational advocacy program. It is our mission to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families in the courts, legislature, schools and community.

Whenever possible, with the provision of reasonable efforts by the Department of Human Services (DHS), children should remain with their parents, thus avoiding the traumatic experience of entering foster care. When children cannot remain safely with their parents, DHS is required to place children in the least restrictive, most family-like setting that is available, close to their family and community. 42 USC § 675(5). Such placements must meet the individualized needs of each child. *Id.* In order to meet the individualized and diverse needs of children in care, DHS needs to contract with a continuum of placements. Due to a lack of available placements, DHS frequently places children far from their family and community. At times, DHS fails to place children in the least restrictive placements appropriate to a child's needs, also due to the extreme lack of available placements. YRJ supports efforts to ensure that available substitute care placements provide high quality care for children. Those efforts must be balanced with efforts to increase the number of placements available for children.