



House Committee on Judiciary  
Re: HB 2849, Relating to protective custody of children

April 8, 2019

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair Gorsek, Vice-Chair Sprenger, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2849. My name is Jenny Lee, and I'm the Advocacy Director for Building Power for Communities of Color, a nonprofit dedicated to policy advocacy for communities of color that will help us achieve a more equitable Oregon.

Families are the foundation of our communities. Children of color, particularly American Indian/Alaska Native Children and African American/Black children, are overrepresented in Oregon's child welfare system at an alarming rate. This is not a new problem. A decade ago, then-Governor Ted Kulongoski stated that "too many children of color, particularly Native American and African American children, are in foster care. The time has come for us to move beyond good intentions to intentional action so we can ensure that children with the same needs are treated equitably, no matter the color of their skin." From that statement and subsequent legislation, a Task Force on Disproportionality was formed. Its findings were clear: the overuse of foster care in Oregon has led to dramatic disproportionality that is "a far-reaching problem with exorbitant costs [and] extraordinary and devastating effects."

Although disproportionality has decreased in Oregon over the past decade, more must be done. Department of Human Services data shows that in 2016 American Indian/Alaska Native Children and African-American/Black children were still more likely to be removed and placed in foster care than their peers, less likely to find a permanent home, and more likely to age out without a legal family. This disproportionality persists throughout our state, in both urban and rural communities.

The Children's Bureau, leading scholars, and the real experts—parents and children who have been through the system—agree that one of the best ways to decrease disproportionality is to promote policies that are grounded in keeping children safely with their own families. Removal is a serious issue disproportionately devastating families of color, and we need to pass a meaningful solution to these unlawful removals. By heightening the standard for removing a child, HB 2849 will help create a fairer system for all families. By failing to address unlawful removals, we are keeping the focus on foster care instead of preventing children from entering the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB 2849.

Respectfully,  
Jenny Lee, Advocacy Director  
Building Power for Communities of Color