



CEDRIC HAYDEN
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 7

Testimony on Senate Bill 745

May 15th, 2019

Colleagues,

I'd like to urge support today for Senate Bill 745, a measure that if enacted, would support foster youth with transitional services. Currently, the law affords youth in foster care with transitional support beginning at age 16. The need to start these services sooner is borne out by data that shows a significant drop-off of adoptability of foster youth beginning at age 14. In 2017, the Oregon Department of Human Services was able to show that of all the adoptions of children who are legally severed from their biological parents, a mere 5.9% of those adopted fell between the ages of 14 to 21.

This demonstrable drop-off rate in adoption compared to their younger foster peers shows a clear need that we need to begin talking to and preparing foster youth sooner while helping them build resiliency at a younger age. Since we know the statistics of these children tend to be worse than their overall peers for everything from on-time high school graduation to college completion, to homelessness and persistent mental health issues, starting these services at a younger age will allow us to isolate any likely issues sooner and connect these youth to resources that will more robustly prepare them for aging out of the system.

While the bill is silent in adding new types of transition services for younger foster youth other than those already offered, it would be beneficial for programmatic services to focus on high school completion, the importance of not falling into credit recovery upon entering high school, and a look forward to early college or career training engagement. Economic transitions tend to be the most difficult as foster youth, and while they still have access to critical safety net services like healthcare through the Oregon Health Plan, a fundamental lack of job skills and lack of success in education completion increases the likelihood that foster youth who age out without a strong familial fall back system will encounter economic hardship. This can be mitigated with early transitional work on the education and career planning portion of transitional services.

Lastly, as a healthcare provider, I'd be remiss if I didn't stress how important it is to include in transitional services the need for self-advocacy and awareness around personal health matters. A foster youth in Oregon who ages out of the system has access to the Oregon Health Plan until they're 26 years of age under provisions related to the Affordable Care Act. However, just because one has insurance doesn't mean they have access. The simple act of having entered into the foster care system will increase the likelihood of lifelong health issues if a foster youth isn't educated in how to self-advocate and recognize the need to engage with physical, oral, and mental health systems. Ensuring this is part of transitional services starting at this younger age of 14, can mitigate future risk of health issues, and help avert foster youth from engaging in unnecessary and risky behaviors that sometimes interconnect with teens aging out of the foster system.

For these reasons, I support SB 745 as a chief sponsor and would urge us to consider passing this legislation before the end of the legislative session.

Sincerely,
Rep. Cedric Hayden

