



Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: January 29, 2020

TO: The Honorable Alissa Keny-Guyer, Chair, and members
Oregon House Committee on Human Services and Housing

SUBJECT: House Bill 4112 to Better Fund Child Abuse Services

The Oregon Pediatric Society, the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, strongly supports HB 4112 and increasing urgently needed funding for Children's Advocacy Centers and child abuse prevention and detection. This bill is tragically true in declaring an emergency.

There are more than 20 Centers across the state, serving all 36 counties, doing heroic work by providing services like medical exams and forensic interviews for abused children, as well as follow up family services and therapies for children who have been victimized, and prevention services.

Even though centers provide statutorily mandated services; engage in an unmatched community collaboration with law enforcement, DAs, DHS, schools, and primary care clinicians; and are widely recognized as "best practice" for identifying and treating abuse; these centers are severely underfunded for the societal need they address. **State funding for centers only averages 17 percent.** The bill's requests will increase state funding to 28 percent, and will directly increase organizational capacity and access to these critical services.

As their waitlists continue to grow, creating delays of weeks in some cases, centers are potentially forced to turn kids away. This is unacceptable, and it is our responsibility to do better. 2017 data shows that 75 percent of children did not have access to a Children's Advocacy Center when they were undergoing a child abuse investigation. When kids aren't able to access a Center, they might instead be taken to a busy emergency room, or be interviewed at a police station and/or have to disclose their abuse over and over again. This is incredibly traumatic for the child and their families.

Through the medical exam and forensic interview process, highly specialized staff at centers help DHS caseworkers determine when abuse is happening and what must occur to keep kids safe. Without these resources, caseworkers are left to make these determinations on their own, without the extensive training and background that medical professionals and trained forensic interviews at centers possess. In 2019, the Legislature made great strides in addressing Oregon's broken child welfare system by adding caseworkers. This important step will also result in increased referrals to centers already unable to meet the current demand due to lack of funding.

Thank you for your consideration and support. Please call on OPS if we can be a resource or answer any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Julie Scholz".

Julie Scholz, MBA, Oregon Pediatric Society Executive Director