

February 3, 2020

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble and Vice-Chair William and Committee Members:

I live in Eugene and am submitting testimony in support of HB4112 which would strengthen our state's response to child abuse and neglect, and our ability to develop targeted prevention efforts. I support the whole bill but will focus in this testimony on the important opportunity posed by the Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS.)

I am a social worker and have spent most of my career working in the area of child abuse prevention. One of the most frustrating aspects of this work has been the lack of good data about rates of child abuse and neglect. Most often, we end up using data that is connected to the number of child abuse reports filed. This is not a good way to get an understanding of how many children are being abused or neglected, and what type of abuse or neglect they experience. In fact, child abuse reporting may go up due to increased community awareness of the resources provided by child welfare or when a community is in the process of becoming more responsive to incidents of child abuse and neglect—and actually be indicative of a move towards a more healthy community rather than an increase in abuse. It's also clear that our reporting system identifies a disproportionate number of people of color and poor people. Yet, we know that child abuse and neglect crosses race and socio-economic lines.

In Oregon, as it now stands, we cannot accurately answer *any* of the following questions:

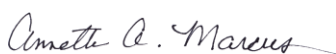
- How many Oregon children and youth have been physically and sexually abused? How many endure chronic neglect?
- How many Oregon children have seen and heard abuse by one adult caregiver toward another?
- Are rates of child abuse and neglect *higher or lower* today than they were 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago?
- Have recent state investments reduced child abuse and neglect in Oregon?

This lack of good data makes it difficult to target our intervention and prevention efforts, and to understand the real scope of the issue. OCAPS is designed to answer these questions – and many others.

We all believe in prevention work in theory, but we need good data to understand whether we are making an impact and to assess what types of prevention and support efforts are most needed. OCAPS also gives us an opportunity to hear directly from youth rather than collecting information from adults about children. As we continue to learn more about the long-term impact of trauma, effectively addressing child abuse and neglect is more important than ever.

I urge you to support HB4112. For too long, Oregon has been responding to crisis after crisis in our child serving systems. It's time for us to lead. I believe if OCAPS is funded, people around the nation will be looking to us a model for how to take a more thoughtful and strategic approach to preventing child abuse and neglect.

Sincerely,



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