



Oregon Network of  
Child Abuse  
Intervention  
Centers

January 31, 2020

Chair Keny-Guyer  
Vice Chair Williams  
Vice Chair Noble

House Committee on Housing and Human Services, members

Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers  
1827 NE 44<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 220  
Portland, OR 97213

RE: HB 4112

The Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers represents a network of over 20 Children's Advocacy Centers that serve children in all 36 counties. Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) provide statutorily mandated services to children who are suspected victims of abuse including specialized medical exams, forensic interviews, and follow up family supports and therapy treatment. We write today in support of HB 4112, which includes a modest \$3M increase in funding for CACs.

CACs offer unique, specialized services and the kind of community coordination that is not found elsewhere in the field of child abuse response. While CACs are independent entities, they work closely with law enforcement, schools, prosecutors, and DHS caseworkers as a third party to collect and share evidence and information in a way that reduces trauma, and the amount of times a child has to re-tell their story. While children can be referred to a Center through a variety of means, the vast majority of referrals come to Centers through DHS caseworkers and law enforcement officers, who do not have the medical expertise necessary to diagnose child abuse, and are relying on Centers to provide the information they need to make fully informed placement and safety recommendations.

Even though CACs are widely recognized as best practices for kids who have been abused, and are depended on by many community partners, they are vastly underfunded. CACs are only funded at 17% by State dollars. This significant lack of funding means that waitlists are increasing, and in some cases, children who need services do not receive them.

Without CACs, children must tell their story to law enforcement, case workers, medical providers, and others in harsh environments that are not child-friendly. This forces children to relive their trauma over and over again, which research has demonstrated can have disastrous physical and mental health consequences over time. Moreover, when interviews are conducted by individuals who are not adequately trained as child forensic interviewers, it can lead to re-traumatization, refusal to disclose, and/or incomplete information. This can also impact the justice systems ability to hold offenders accountable.

Last Session, recognizing the importance of Centers, the growing need, and the current lack of access caused by poor state funding, this committee voted to increase funding to CACs as your top funding priority. Unfortunately, this increased funding was not realized in 2019.

However, the Legislature did vote to add 345 additional caseworkers to DHS. This increase in DHS investment was historic, and will help improve Oregon's broken child welfare system – but only if new and retained caseworkers are able to get children into CACs in a timely manner. To build a system giving children and families the service they deserve, all critical components must be available and working in harmony. CACs must be able to provide correct and timely diagnoses of abuse, and rule out abuse if families are involved in child welfare and do not need to be. In providing comprehensive, coordinated care – this step is essential.

A \$3M increase in funding to CACs will vastly increase access for children who need our services. This funding will decrease waitlists, reduce trauma for more children, and ensure more successful prosecutions (which help prevent victimization of more children).

In closing, we would like to thank Reps. Keny Guyer, Williams, and all nine members of the House Human Services Committee for taking up this important issue, and for signing on as sponsors to HB 4112. We respectfully urge swift passage of HB 4112 and increased funding for CACs.

Sincerely,

Becky Jones  
Executive Director  
Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers