



January 24, 2020

Chair Keny Guyer
Vice Chair Williams
Vice Chair Noble
House Human Services Committee
900 Court St. NE, Rm. 140A,
Salem, OR 97301

Yamhill Community Care urges support for HB 4112 and increasing funding for Children's Advocacy Centers by \$3M. There are more than 20 centers across the state, serving all 36 counties by providing services like medical exams and forensic interviews - as well as prevention services and follow up family services and therapies for children who have been victimized. Centers work in incredibly close collaboration with law enforcement, DHS, district attorneys, schools and other community partners. While kids can be referred to a center through a variety of means, most referrals come from DHS/CPS caseworkers.

By providing these services, centers act as a critical tool for DHS caseworkers. Through the medical exam and forensic interview process, highly specialized staff at centers help 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 - adding 300 caseworkers to the field is an admirable first step, but that progress is undermined if the new caseworkers are not armed with the tools they need to be successful in keeping kids safe.

Additionally, increased caseworkers will result in increased referrals to centers - which are already unable to meet the current demand due to lack of funding. 2017 data (most recently available) 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. Not only is this traumatic for the kid and their families, it also lessens their ability to effectively seek justice, since the quality of evidence collected is significantly diminished.

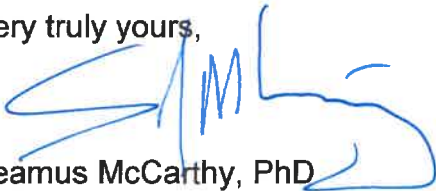
Several centers have reported that they reached their 2018 case numbers by August 2019. Today, centers are potentially forced to turn kids away as their waitlists continue to grow - up to 3.5 weeks in some cases. This is simply unacceptable, especially when a better answer exists in Children's Advocacy Centers.

Even though centers provide statutorily mandated services (like Karly's law exams), engage in an unmatched community collaboration with law enforcement, DAs, DHS, schools, etc. and are widely recognized as "best practice" for identifying and treating abuse, state funding for centers only averages 17 percent across centers. A modest increase of just \$3M will increase state funding to 28 percent, and will directly increase access to these critical services.

Adding additional caseworkers will not solve the fundamental issues in our child welfare system - we must also arm them with the tools they need, well-resourced Children's Advocacy Centers.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Very truly yours,



Seamus McCarthy, PhD
President and Chief Executive Officer