

Testimony in support of HB 4120  
House Human Service and Housing Committee  
February 3rd, 2020

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Williams, members of the committee, for the record my name is Alexis Baska, I am 23 years old, and from the great state of Oregon where I spent 5 ½ years in its foster care system. I currently live in Washington County but in my 23 years of life spent in this beautiful state, I've also lived in Columbia County, Clatsop County, Deschutes County, and Jackson County, one could call me an Oregon enthusiast.

I grew up mostly in Columbia County in the small town of Vernonia. Just before I was 15, I entered into the foster care system after the loss of my father. I had little to no knowledge of what the foster care system was when I was told that I was going into it. I felt like no one understood what I was going through, and unsure of where I fit into the world. A few months after entering care, my case worker told me about the Independent Living Program that took place in St. Helens. I was hooked after my very first group, for the first time I felt as though I wasn't an outsider and that I was where I belonged. My love for ILP only grew with time. I attended every group, and event I could. I got opportunities to expand my leadership skills and what truly meant the most, find my community and friends that are now chosen family. Growing up in a rural area can make anyone feel isolated, ILP was one of the only outlets that relieved that for awhile. From that point on, it was my mission to someday be an ILP worker and do for others what had been done for me.

In the last 5 years, I've gotten the opportunity to testify in front of the House and Human Service Committee on multiple bills to improve the foster care system, intern with FosterClub the national network for youth in foster care, shadowed my congress woman and testify on behalf of the Family First Act in Washington, D.C., present to college students, healthcare professionals, as well as child welfare professionals. The list goes on and on. All of which started by attending one ILP conference, had it not been for these opportunities and experiences, I wouldn't be the person I am today, nor would I be an ILP provider myself.

This was my dream job, but I was really surprised to find out some of the details when I was on boarded to my new job in December - as a contract position, I am not offered health insurance - luckily I have insurance through age 26 as a former foster youth, but it can be a challenge for ILP workers and I was told not to work over 35 hours a week, which can be challenging to drive around Columbia Co. to meet with youth. With additional funding to the ILP program, these are worries and concerns I may not have.

I am both a successful and failed product of the foster care system. I found permanency in the people and connections through ILP but aged out of the system without ever being

adopted or connected to a family, my forever family turned out to be my fellow foster youth and the adults that wanted the world for us. When you vote yes on HB 4120, you're voting on the possibility of a brighter future not only for current foster youth, but for all that will go through the system. You're voting to give these youth the opportunity to change the world, and that in my book is priceless.

On behalf of OFYC and myself, I'd like to thank you for your time and consideration.

Alexis L. Baska