



Empowering, Supporting, and Advocating for All Resource Parents

House Human Services Committee

February 4th, 2020

Testimony in Support of HB 4120

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Noble, Vice Chair Williams, and members of the Committee:

My name is Jessica Lloyd-Rogers and I am the president of the Oregon Foster Parent Association. We are committed to empowering, supporting, and advocating for all Oregon Resource Parents including foster, adoptive, relative caregiver, kith and kin, and guardians. We include caregivers certified by DHS, private and tribal agencies, and those who serve Oregon Youth Authority.

In 2019, 610 young people aged out of foster care with no supports. Not only are these young people handicapped at a critical point in their lives, but this atrocious fact will have an incalculable impact on the future of our communities and our state. All of us, but, especially legislators, have a choice. We can invest now in our young people who are entering adulthood, or we can pay later when their lack of knowledge and preparation may lead them to bad decisions that further damage our state's health and well-being.

Forty-five years ago, I aged out of the foster care system unprepared for the practical demands of adult life. Learning what I needed to know was hard, heartbreaking, and too frequently, dangerous. It appears that not much has changed. Data shows us that foster youth will face more obstacles, barriers, and detours than most young people face. Former foster youth are currently less likely to finish high school and gain higher education and are more likely to face disproportionate levels of unemployment and homelessness. Unfortunately, they are also at higher risks for domestic violence, incarceration, and suicide.

In 2017, fewer than half of eligible youth received ILP services. The Independent Living Program helps give foster youth the skills they need for a more positive future. It codifies the learning for 'adulthood' issues so that nothing is missed, and it gives youth the opportunity for another supportive adult relationship. Those who volunteer as Resource parents do what they can to prepare youth for the launch to adulthood on top of their already full plate. But it is, of necessity, a hit and miss proposition. They cannot do it all, nor should they, as these young people are in the care of the state (that's you folks). OFPA believes that every foster youth deserves to be prepared in a systematic way to optimize their survival in the larger community and to give them the best chance to become confident, competent, contributing adults to our larger communities.

HB 4120 asks for an additional \$2 million for transition services for foster youth through Oregon's Independent Living Program (ILP). If passed, ILP providers will be stabilized so they continue their important work. This investment will result in more coaches, create smaller caseloads, and serve up to 200 more youth in the ILP program statewide. It isn't enough, but it is a good start.

I'm a survivor and a veteran of foster care. I fought the odds to sit here before you today. ILP services such as those in HB 4120 don't just ease a young person's transition. They will impact his or her life for decades. These young people will make a difference in our community. It is up to you what kind of difference they are empowered and prepared to make.

On behalf of the Oregon Foster Parent Association, I ask that you support and expand ILP services so that all foster youth in Oregon are prepared to transition out of foster care and become successful adults. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.