

## **Coos County Model Court Team**

c/o Nikki Wright, Judicial Assistant, Coos County Courthouse, 250 N. Baxter, Coquille, OR 97423 (541) 396-4115

February 4, 2020

Dear Chair Sanchez, Vice Chairs Bynum and Sprenger, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

We are the Model Court Team from Coos County. Model court teams consist of all the stakeholders in the dependency system and meet in every judicial district to work through policies, logistical issues and analyze data with the goal of making our system better for the families that we interact with. Working together, we have designed a streamlined electronic exhibit process, reduced the numbers of children who re-enter foster care, and designed a protective custody order process in response to HB2849 last session that works well for us. We write to convey our team's strong support of House Bill 4040.

A Family Treatment Court in our county could serve 30-35 families in Coos County providing wrap-around care for parents on the road to recovery and children at risk due to substance abuse and addiction at home. These services will be supported with intensive judicial involvement and oversight of their case by our experienced juvenile judge and staff, and we are prepared to make that investment with your support.

### ***The Need in Our Judicial District***

In our county the number of addiction-affected justice system participants has reached new levels of crisis. There is an acute need for unique and appropriately tailored responses to those parents who, due to addiction, risk having their parental rights terminated. In our county, most families who are in the dependency system are touched by addiction. In 83% of the current dependency cases, at least one parent has alcohol or substance abuse as one basis for jurisdiction. We have 133 families in our system. About 40 families are actively participating in treatment. Additionally, we have nine teenage wards participating in our marijuana diversion classes. Many of the terminations of parental rights in the past two years have been due to relapse and failure to maintain sobriety.

Things are looking up here. The legislature has invested in us and we appreciate it. We are using the Parent Child Representation Program to great effect and the families appreciate the changes that has brought, including case managers. We were an early rollout county for DOJ full representation and have a process and a schedule that works effectively and dedicated attorneys that have greatly improved the quality of hearings we have. We are seeing new DHS caseworkers every day. We have new beds available in the clean and sober housing area. We have medically assisted treatment available in Coos County for the first time and that has brought great improvements in the success rates for opioid treatment. In one recent termination case, the mother engaged in that program and was able to convince the state that she had addressed her addiction. The petition was dismissed, the plan was changed back to reunification, and her children are in her home today. Every team member concurred in that result. In another case, a child who was one of our legal orphans because of a failed adoption was able to be returned to his mother after she participated in treatment. The state used the bill from two sessions ago to ask the court to vacate the judgment terminating her parental rights, and she is working a reunification plan as we speak. We have so many pieces in place. What we need now is a coordinated response and dedicated court time to address addiction issues early, consistently and with the supportive services that will allow our families to succeed.

### ***A Different Response for Families Struggling with Substance Abuse Disorder***

The Family Treatment Court model provides a meaningful alternative to the traditional case management in child welfare cases. Family Treatment Courts are for parents who require treatment for a substance abuse disorder and who are involved with the child welfare system because of alleged child abuse or neglect. This specialty court program combines intensive judicial monitoring with multidisciplinary interventions. By offering treatment, accountability, and supportive opportunities for safe reunification, these programs decrease the amount of time children are in foster care and reduce trauma to both parent and child.

The hallmarks of Family Treatment Courts are collaboration and accountability. Parents engaged in Family Treatment Courts will have all of the treatment providers associated with their case working together to holistically treat the challenges the families are facing through weekly case management meetings with all stakeholders present. Parents will have their services tailored to their individual needs and family circumstances. The Family Treatment Court builds upon the best qualities of each piece of the system through a model founded upon communication, community effort, and creative problem-solving.

Another important component of Family Treatment Courts is the frequency of case management meetings and check-ins with the judge overseeing the case. We have a supportive court and frequently problem-solve through review hearings. For these cases during the active treatment phase, it is vital to address barriers before a parent loses motivation to change. People come back from relapses, but the longer they are, the less likely the parent will complete treatment and the longer a child waits, often in foster care.

### ***Delivering Results, Healing Parents, Protecting Kids***

Family Treatment Courts deliver measurable, positive results. Children are less likely to be placed in foster care, parents are more likely to be successful in treatment, and the promise of recovery is real.

We have spoken with the treatment providers and child welfare advocates in our county including Diedre Lindsey from ADAPT and Steve Sanden from Bay Area First Step and we are united in our support of this bill. I am confident that an investment in our county will yield positive results for families, which in turn, yields results in the strength and well-being of our community. Support from you is the only way we can make this happen, as we need the capital investment to reorganize the court to allow judge time to concentrate on dependency cases.

We urge you to support House Bill 4040. We thank you for your consideration and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Megan Jacquot-Circuit Court Judge  
Thomas Lankford-Trial Court Administrator  
Mike Marchant-DHS South Coast Regional Manager-District 7  
Steve Shirtcliff and Jasmine Lockwood- Coos County CASA  
Sharon Mitchell-Coos Juvenile Consortium Administrator  
Stacey Lowe- Director, Southwestern Oregon Public Defenders Office  
Lewann Rice- President, Coos Foster Parents Ass'n.  
Laurie Judd- Coordinator, Coos Citizen Review Board