

# Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

February 4, 2020

Sen. Prozanski, Chair  
Sen. Thatcher, Vice-Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Support for SB 1568: Vulnerable Youth Guardianship

Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

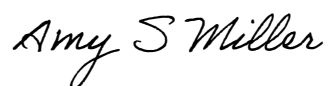
As Oregon's defense firm dedicated exclusively to juvenile law, YRJ is court-appointed to represent children in foster care, parents whose children have been removed, and youth in the juvenile justice system. We are a team of 34 attorneys, legal assistants, and other specialists. We represent over 800 clients each year. Roughly 80% of our clients are in the child welfare (foster care) system, with the balance in the juvenile justice system. All of our clients come from low income families. Most have suffered significant trauma and many have physical, mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Approximately 45% are children of color.

Over our four-decade history, we have also worked with the systems supporting vulnerable children, youth and families, changing them for the better. Because of our unique position handling court-appointed juvenile cases, we often see the same systemic problems and we work to change the policies that contribute to these problems. Through this, our work has touched hundreds of thousands of Oregonians.

YRJ regularly represents abused, neglected, or abandoned children who qualify for juvenile court protections, and later can apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Although juvenile court oversight (including guardianship) can continue until age 21, a child must already have filed a juvenile court petition before age 18 in order to qualify for assistance until age 21. As a result, young people who would otherwise be eligible for juvenile court oversight between ages 18-21 are unable to access the juvenile court after age 18. This gap, caused by the inability of an 18-21 year old to initiate a juvenile court petition, is particularly harsh for immigrant youth. Although they may otherwise qualify for lawful permanent residence through Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, they currently have no state law mechanism to stabilize their living situations and to request the special findings they need.

YRJ supports guardianships for vulnerable youth as a means of remedying the limitation on juvenile court involvement for 18- to 21-year-olds in the juvenile code.

Sincerely,



Amy S. Miller  
Executive Director