



June 23, 2020

Joint Committee on the First Special Session of 2020  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Chair Kotek, Co-Vice Chair Girod, Co-Vice Chair Drazan, and Members of the Committee:

In 2020, after working in partnership for three years, Children First for Oregon (CFFO) and The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon (CTFO) merged to form **Our Children Oregon (OCO)**. OCO's mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We elevate data and the voices of communities to amplify the need and collaboratively develop policy and public investments to improve overall child and family well-being across the state. We continue to convene the Children's Agenda, a partnership of 120 organizations, looking at the holistic needs of children.

As you prepare to move into a special session, to address the critical issues facing our state as we respond to COVID-19 and the systemic racism inherent in our systems, we focus our testimony today on the **Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act, with the request that this important bill ([HB 4148A](#) from the 2020 short session) is considered during the First Special Session of 2020.**

The one-page summary from the 2020 Session can be found [here](#) as background information. **The Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) continues to be a priority on the 2020 Children's Agenda.**

We must do better for all of our children, especially those who are impacted by historic racism. The federal ICWA was passed in 1978 in response to the systematic removal of 25% - 35% of all Native children from their families and communities. At that time, 85% of those children were placed outside of their families and communities—even when fit and willing relatives were available.

The ICWA was passed to maintain the cultural, tribal and family connections that children need to thrive. Today, Native children are placed in foster care at the highest rate of any children in Oregon. We need to do better.

The Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act will codify the national standards of ICWA into Oregon statute to

promote the safety of Native children, preserve tribal families and communities, recognize tribal sovereignty, and support compliance with ICWA in courtrooms and DHS offices throughout the state.

Oregon ICWA is well-suited for passage in a special session built on addressing both a viral pandemic and racial injustice for historically marginalized communities. The State of Oregon's history of removing native children from their families persists today in disproportionate removal of native children from their families. Now is the time for Oregon to join other states in the national best practice of having a state ICWA.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chris Coughlin  
Legislative Director

Jenifer Wagley  
Executive Director