

To: Senate Judiciary Committee
From: Alicia Temple, Oregon Law Center
Date: February 3, 2021
Re: SB 572 Support Vulnerable Youth

Chair Prozanski and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I respectfully request your support for SB 572 to provide support for vulnerable Oregon youth.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. The vast majority of our clients have incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide basic necessities for themselves and their family. The crises of the past year have exacerbated the challenges for our low-income community.

OLC has represented clients who are stuck in the middle of the differing definitions between federal and state procedures when it comes to vulnerable youth guardianships, and it creates confusion for the youth who are looking for stability and help from the process. SB 572 aligns Oregon law with federal law, by removing a barrier to vulnerable youths' ability to have a guardian and apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). SIJI is a legal status that prevents deportation of a youth who has been abandoned, abused or neglected and who will be at risk if returned to their home country.

This guardianship process balances the choice of the vulnerable youth with the protection of the court. The bill was drafted with many stakeholder groups to ensure it achieved the goals of preventing the further abuse of youth, decreasing reliance on public resources and reducing youth homelessness, and providing vulnerable youth with the stability that comes with guardianship.

Oregon should join states like Washington, California, and Colorado that have addressed this misalignment between federal and state law. By allowing courts to appoint a guardian to vulnerable youth over 18, the legislature will provide protection for youth who have been subject to trauma and are at risk for further abuse. While the universe of youth who will benefit from SB 572 may be small, the individual impact on each of those youth will be significant. Thank you for your support for SB 572.