



For the record my name is Nick Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Youth Progress, a member of Foster Plus, and the Oregon Alliance for children, families, and communities. I am here today in support of SB 5529, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Budget and any and all investments there-in that invest in community based organizations who are on the front lines every day providing the critically important placements, supports, and services to children, youth, and families involved in the Child Welfare and Self Sufficiency Systems.

These organizations serve as the linchpin of our state's safety net. As a former state employee who worked for both ODHS child welfare and self sufficiency, and a former foster parent I have seen first hand how life-changing these organizations can be when they are available and how disheartening it is when organizations close and/or services go away.

For the last 4 years I have served as the executive director of Youth Progress, an organization in Portland that provides Behavior Rehabilitation Services to young people in the care and custody of ODHS or OYA. This includes recruiting, certifying, training, and supporting Proctor Foster Parents, placing young people into their homes, and then providing specialized services.

I arrived at Youth Progress with grand visions of what we could do to improve the outcomes for young people placed into our programs today, and programs we could build and design to better meet the needs of young people in these systems tomorrow. Through these efforts we secured key investments and were able to successfully recruit and certified 33 Proctor Foster Parents, a 3x increase, now serving as a critical part of the continuum of care and eliminating the need for out of state placements. We also built a College & Career Attainment Program to help young people transition out of correctional institutions and into independent living with a clear plan and pathways to successful adulthood.

Imagine for a moment what we could do if we had stable resources to activate all of our other great plans to meet the complex needs of young people in our state. Imagine what we could do if our incredible team of staff, managers, directors and foster parents worked together year over year, practiced, learned, created and innovated. Think about how much good we could do in 5yrs. 10yrs. Instead, our average tenure is 1.7yrs and we have turnover rate of about 50%

This is why I remain hopeful. Hopeful that key investments have been made and additional investments can be made. The life changing impact we have is immeasurable. Young people like RM who was placed at Youth Progress last October. From day one, she has expressed that school is not important, nor is it the priority. First quarter, she proved her point, getting three F's and one A. The proctor foster mom was clear and consistent and continued coaching her on almost a daily basis, offering feedback of how this reflects on her later in life, and supporting her with school staff. Toward the end of second quarter, RM stated that she wanted to improve her

grades. And that wasn't worth the fight anymore. They spent the last two weeks of the quarter turning in assignments. I am proud to say that her hard work has paid off. 2 A's, 2 B's and a C.

Thank you for your consideration of increasing investments into the success and stability of young people in the care of our state, including POP 110 which makes key investments into our workforce. Without workforce stability there cannot be Youth Progress

Then think about how much more we could do if organizations like mine, and the broad continuum of organizations that comprise our sector had the time and resources to think beyond organizational stability and moved into a sector that was thriving.

That is why I am also testifying in support of HB2424, which provides funding for training, diversifying workforce, student loan repayment, and apprenticeship. Did you know that:

At Chick-fil-A

If you make a mistake you burn somebody's french fries, or maybe your own fingers, covid notwithstanding.

And yet, more than 3,000 students will receive a \$2,500 scholarship with the ability to re-apply for up to four years. This amounts to a potential total of \$10,000 for college while working at a Chick-fil-A restaurant.

At Starbucks,

If you make a mistake you burn someone's latte, or maybe make a cappuccino instead of a frappuccino, again covid notwithstanding

And yet, if you work there, part- or full-time you are eligible to receive 100% tuition coverage for a first-time bachelor's degree through Arizona State University's online program.

At Youth Progress

We are licensed in the state of Oregon as a Child Caring Agency to foster care for all genders ages 13 to 21 years. We contract with the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) to provide Behavior Rehabilitation Services in the Portland Metro area to young people from across the state. We use evidenced based and promising practices to provide Trauma-informed and Culturally responsive services.

If one of our staff or proctor foster parents makes a mistake, they may impact the life of a young person in foster care, or may even be investigated for abusing or neglecting a child. And yet, we do not have resources that Chick-fil-A or Starbucks have to recruit and train their teams.

This is why I implore you to support HB2424 focused on workforce recruitment and retention investment. We must ensure safety and positive outcomes for children and youth. We must have urgency with this issue, as we are in the midst of a workforce crisis, in the middle of a global pandemic. The young people we serve need stability, and need us to close the revolving

door of staff in their lives who are there to help. HB2424 will not solve everything, but it is a great place to start... Just like our staff start their careers in the helping professions with us, with a desire to be there for Oregon's most vulnerable and high opportunity youth.

Further, I would like to express my support for HB2544, providing increased investments in Homeless Youth programs; POP 110 & 115, which aligns BRS rates with the most current Oregon Wage Index; and POP SOT, which funds Sex Offender Treatment for youth who are adjudicated.

I was born and raised in Oregon. I have lived here my entire life. I know we are committed to the success of the young people in our state. Our state's motto is *Alis Volat Propriis* - "She Flies With Her Own Wings" - reflecting our tradition of independence and innovation.

Each of these investments are critical to the young people in our communities' ability to secure and maintain their independence from the system and become our state's future leaders, scholars, artists, athletes, entrepreneurs, and innovators!

Thank you,

Nick Gallo, MSW
Executive Director
Youth Progress