

To Co-Chairs Sen. Johnson, Sen. Steiner Hayward, Rep. Rayfield and Members of the Committee:

As the CEO of Liberty House, the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) serving Marion and Polk Counties, I urge you to approve the entire \$16.6 million ARPA request submitted by the Oregon Child Abuse Solutions (OCAS) statewide network. Consisting of 21 centers annually serving nearly 8,000 children in 36 counties, CACs provide the specialized medical diagnoses and forensic interviews mandated in ORS Chapter 418 and desperately needed by the Oregon DHS caseworkers and law enforcement investigators who are charged with making critical child safety decisions. A long history of chronic underfunding has left these centers with crippling deferred maintenance and staffing that is grossly inadequate to effectively meet the needs of the thousands of children at risk in Oregon. This funding would assist in correcting that injustice and ultimately would relieve pressure on the General Fund, setting these centers up for success. As I said in my testimony before this Committee on April 14, 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic has been disastrous for Oregon's children. At Liberty House, we have seen a sharp increase in the numbers of infants and toddlers with multiple broken bones and countless sets of siblings isolated at home with their sexual abusers. I am painting a dark picture on purpose: as Oregonians, we need to confront the stark facts. The public health crisis that is child abuse far outweighs the havoc wreaked by Covid-19, and I am well aware of the disastrous effects of Covid-19. Despite the school shutdown and reported 25% decrease in calls to the DHS Child Abuse Hotline, Liberty House saw 17% MORE children in its clinic in 2020. My staff is exhausted and just now the referrals are increasing because children are going back to school. We have a staff of 47, saw 678 children in the clinic and another 300+ in our therapy program. We are a solid employer and pay nearly \$500,000 in payroll taxes each year. Please help. Please. You have heard me testify many times. This is THE most important investment you could possibly approve and I implore you to do so. Liberty House serves both Marion and Polk Counties. We need to hire another full-time medical provider (that would allow us to see about 200 more children each year), we need about \$150,000 to upgrade our forensic interviewing equipment; we need funding for our Prevention Education program and some facility deferred maintenance such as a new HVAC system. Community donations and grants from foundations are down over 25% this last year. This has exposed the fundamental flaw: CACs should never have had to rely on community fundraising to pay for these critical, lifesaving services. You have an opportunity to fix that flaw. Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of my request. It was an honor to appear before you on April 14. Although I am registered to testify on April 24, I choose to yield my time to Lincoln County CAC Director Paul Schrader so you can hear from his voice and others. That said, I would be happy to answer any questions you might have following the hearing on 4/24/21. Thank you once again for understanding the needs of vulnerable children in Oregon and for investing in the critical services provided by your 21 CACs. Alison S. Kelley, JD, CEO, Liberty House; Salem, Oregon.