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May 11, 2021

To: House Committee On Judiciary
From: Amy Miller, Executive Director

Re: **Support for SB 436: changing “youth offender” to “adjudicated youth”**

Dear Chair Bynum, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Power, and Members of the Committee,

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 40 attorneys, legal assistants, social workers, and other specialists. We represent over 1200 clients each year. 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.

We are writing to encourage your support of SB 436. While changing terminology in the juvenile code may seem inconsequential, *words matter*. Labeling theory suggests that the way people act is influenced significantly by the way other members of society label them. A label of “deviant,” “delinquent”, or “youth offender” can affect the way in which young people come to define themselves and how society views them, thus influencing their future behaviors and dictating the social roles they can assume, even after exiting the juvenile justice system.¹

SB 436 is also consistent with a positive youth development approach to working with youth. This research-based model recognizes and enhances youth strengths, supports positive growth and development, and acknowledges autonomy and individuality. Positive youth development strategies are widely used by youth-serving organizations including the Oregon Youth Authority and Multnomah County Juvenile Department.²

¹ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (February 2017) citing to Dick, Andrew J., Dan J. Pence, Randall M. Jones, and H. Reed Geertsen. 2004. “The Need for Theory in Assessing Peer Courts.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 47:1448–61,

https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/media/document/diversion_programs.pdf.

² See <https://www.oregon.gov/oya/Publications/AtAGlance-PHD.pdf> and <https://multco.us/dcj-juvenile/community-healing-initiative-chi>.