



# 2020 Policy Recommendations

Twenty-six current and former foster youth from across the state participated in Oregon Foster Youth Connection's virtual 2020 Policy Conference. On Aug 25th, many of them presented the following recommendations to an audience of lawmakers, Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) administrators, service providers, and community members. Through its youth-led model of civic engagement and leadership development, Oregon Foster Youth Connection trains youth to identify pressing issues within the foster care system, develop concrete solutions, and then educate policymakers and advocate for change. Since 2008, Oregon Foster Youth Connection has worked to ensure that foster youth are meaningfully involved in the improvement of the foster care system and their voices are heard.

## Supporting Youth in Care who are 18-21

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### *Money Management*

**Problem:** Lack of availability to financial training and information regarding finances and funding for the youth. This is an issue because our foster children that age out may not have the skills and knowledge to properly support themselves financially and then end up homeless. It's important to know how to manage a bank account, your credit score, and how to file taxes when employed.

**Solution:** Providing an easier and reliable way for foster families and youth to access information about resources.

**Policy Recommendation:** Enforce mandatory workshops entailing financial planning and training to foster youth in every county. Also adding a link or QR code to the Oregon Foster Children's Bill of Rights that leads to a website containing all resources available to youth.

### *Housing and Employment*

**Problem:** Our problem is that 18-21-year-old foster youth in Oregon face challenges when applying for housing and employment. Youth aren't taught how to live on their own or the essential needs such as cooking, paying bills, getting a job, how to act at an interview, etc.

**Solution:** Foster youth from ages 18-21 should be taught before aging out how to live on their own. Some examples are cooking, cleaning, filling out applications, etc.

**Policy Recommendation:** Proposing a mandatory school requirement for the Home Economics class to take place and be added required class needed to graduate. We also want to ask that youth get these classes at ODHS if they don't have an ILP worker. ILP has classes to help teach youth cooking, cleaning, filling out applications, and tools to get a job (clothing, interview practice, filling out applications, etc.).

### *Mental Health*

**Problem:** Foster youth are having difficulty accessing the resources to benefit their mental health.

**Solution:** Compile a list of Mental Health Resources that are given out to foster parents and youth with the Sibling Bill of Rights.

**Policy Recommendation:** Work with ODHS and Mental Health services to compile a list of Mental Health Resources per county with LGBTQIA friendly resources.

# Understanding and Healing from Trauma

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## *Diverse Therapeutic Options*

### **Problem:**

- Youth lack access to diverse options for mental health treatment besides traditional talk therapy (not all youth heal and process trauma in the same way, and certain traumatic experiences respond better to certain types of therapy, ex. Art therapy).
- There is a lack of knowledge and resources provided by DHS to help youth know what options are available to them for them to give input on what treatment works best for them

**Solution:** Youth should be surveyed on what their preferences are for different aspects of therapy (ex. Gender of therapist, technique, style, etc.), and that information should help decide their treatment. Youth should be given information about the various therapies and therapeutic approaches out there. Oregon Health Authority should open up more broad therapeutic services for Medicaid and Oregon Health Plan users.

**Policy Recommendation:** Create an ODHS policy that standardizes access to quality mental health services for youth across the state by:

- Allowing them to take a survey that indicates their preferences for therapy (to use when matching youth with treatment)
- Providing youth with a list of therapy services and therapeutic approaches, and ask for their input on what type of therapy they want

## *Biological Favoritism*

**Problem:** Foster Parents giving preferential treatment to their biological children.

**Solution:** Mixed (biological and non-biological) homes having written policy contracts.

**Policy Recommendation:** Caseworkers oversee/approve of mandatory mixed home contracts and hold foster

## *Informed and Culturally Sensitive Placements*

### **Problem:**

- Youth placed in homes where sensitivity trainings for foster/adopted families haven't taken place are often faced with discrimination and microaggressions.
- Trainings are only applied to foster parents and not the whole family unit or others in the foster home who come in contact with youth.
- The cultural trainings that currently exist don't go in-depth enough for foster families for understand youth's cultural backgrounds.

**Solution:** Foster families and care teams already receive Foundations training on cultural sensitivity. This training should be more comprehensive on the various cultural backgrounds of foster youth in the home, and should help foster families know how to apply cultural sensitivity. All members in the household with the foster youth should be trained, not only foster parents.

**Policy Recommendation:**

- Have ODHS work more closely with Indigenous, Black, and other minority groups to revamp and go more in depth with existing training geared toward the youth's culture, religious affiliation, gender orientation, ethnicity, political beliefs, and more.
- Give Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color a choice on whether their foster families should go through a more specific cultural training.
- ODHS should ensure that the cultural sensitivity trainings should be given to all members who are in the household and not only foster parents.

# Removing Racial Bias from Foster Care

## *Lack of Culturally Responsive Services and Resources that Meet the Needs of Foster Youth of Color (Black/Indigenous)*

**Problem:** Foster youth of color are disproportionately impacted by abuse in foster homes. Currently, foster parents can have founded abuse allegations against them and still legally remain a foster parent.

**Solution:** We want foster parents to no longer have a legal right to be a foster parent after abuse allegations are founded (including group home/residential treatment facility staff).

**Policy Recommendation:** Legislators must pass a law so that foster parents no longer have a legal right to be a foster parent after abuse allegations are founded (including group home/residential treatment facility staff).

## *Lack of Culturally Responsive Services and Resources that Meet the Needs of Foster Youth of Color (Black/Indigenous)*

**Problem:** Foster youth of color are disproportionately impacted by abuse in foster homes. Foster youth of color are disproportionately overmedicated and lacking in mental health services.

**Solution:** ODHS to better meet the physical/mental/emotional needs of foster youth of color.

**Policy Recommendation:** ODHS must also better meet the physical/mental/emotional needs of foster youth of color.

- Check-ins without foster parent present
- More frequent revisiting of medication diagnoses
- More diverse mental health supports (forms of therapy, availability of therapists, etc.)

## *Removing Racial Bias*

**Problem:** Lack of historical and cultural knowledge regarding the institutional racism in the United States.

- Parents not knowledgeable on cultural and historical differences.
- The parents not having enough education on racism and of thinking about the historical, or even deadly consequences and implications of systemic racism and not understanding how youth of a different ethnic/cultural background are treated differently than white people in the United States nor are they educated on how to handle it properly when confronted on it.
- Not giving the right lessons necessary for people of color or indigenous youth so that they don't end up dead or worse.

**Solution:** Providing mandatory classes led by Black/African-Americans, Indigenous people, and other people of color, for judges, case workers, ILP workers, attorneys and so on, on the institutional and systemic racism within the United States.

**Policy Recommendation:** Mandatory classes taught by Black/African-American people, Indigenous people, and other people of color about the systemic and societal racism within the United States to all current and future DHS workers and partners regardless of position or power.

## *Reviewing/revising the processes in removing a child from their biological home*

**Problem:** Bias and racial profiling towards parents of color by ODHS when removing children from their biological homes.

**Solution:** Annually review and revise the current process ODHS uses when removing a child from their biological home.

**Policy Recommendation:** An annual review and revision of the process ODHS uses when deciding to remove a child from their biological home by a team of people to allow for a variety of opinions of ways to better meet the needs of BIPOC families. Specifically, this team would include BIPOC caseworkers, youth, parents, grandparents and others who have all had experiences with the child welfare system.