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Testimony of Arthur Towers

OTLA Political Director

## **In Opposition to SB 92 as Introduced**

Before the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

February 12, 2021

Chair Gelser, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to SB 92.

Our members fight for the rights of children who suffer from abuse and for their survivors. We seek to hold abusers accountable and sometimes we seek to hold the state accountable if the state has acted negligently in its oversight of the child welfare system.

DHS is working diligently to protect children and we appreciate their efforts a great deal. Our role is to make sure there is accountability, justice, and closure for victims and their families. Our members see the worst cases and so we are extremely sensitive about access to information about what has happened that led to the abuse of a child.

We don't cast aspersions on the motives of proponents. We just want to make sure the wording on the bill is precise.

We are concerned that provisions of SB 92 will reduce transparency and increase secrecy in child abuse cases. This written testimony augments the verbal testimony of OTLA leader Neil Jackson provided at 1:35:30 of the Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> hearing.

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/mediaplayer/?clientID=4879615486&eventID=2021021032>

The way SB 92 is set up, DHS has a conflict of interest. If a child is abused, DHS can be an accountable party in litigation and simultaneously the entity determining who has access to evidence.

We believe there is a straightforward way to improve the bill to make sure that the child's representative in legal proceedings be provided access to the records.

We look forward to working with proponents to resolve these important issues.

But as written, OTLA is strongly opposed to SB 92, and urge the committee to vote no.