



February 1, 2021

Chair Williams, Vice-Chair Leif, Vice-Chair Ruiz, and Members of the committee,

My name is Robin Donart and I am currently the Director of Residential Services at the Robinswood program of New Avenues for Youth. Robinswood is a short-term residential program providing stabilization and assessment for youth who are experiencing particularly challenging issues and behaviors. We also serve as a Qualified Residential Treatment Program for Intensive Behavioral Services to a small number of youth who might be eligible. I have also previously served as the Executive Director of Maple Star Oregon which provides therapeutic foster care and in-home services to youth and families.

In my nearly twenty years working within the child welfare system in Oregon, I have found equity to be an issue that has not adequately been addressed and which has a significant impact on youth in foster care. In 2009, the Child Welfare Equity Task Force reviewed data to show that children who are African American, Native American, and Pacific Islander were removed from the home at a higher rate than white children, and that children of color had significantly higher representation in foster care than white children. In addition to racial disproportionality, there is an overrepresentation of youth in foster care who have cognitive disabilities and who are in the LGBTQIA2S+ population. The Task Force identified that two of the root causes for this are structural inequalities (policy/practice, budgets, culturally biased decision-making) and the lack of a diverse workforce, training, and accountability.

At New Avenues for Youth, and at Robinswood in particular, we have made equity issues a matter of priority, in terms of our workforce, our policies and procedures, and our services to youth and young adults. It is critical to evaluate all of our actions and decisions utilizing an equity lens in order to identify any unconscious bias and continue to improve our policies and practices. I would like to ensure that this is being done in the Child Welfare unit of Oregon's Department of Human Services and I believe that HB2505 can support that. Creating a Child Welfare Equity Committee that will operate under the existing Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission, outside of the purview of DHS, will allow for balanced ongoing monitoring of equity issues in Child Welfare and the creation of recommendations to advance equity causes and address concerns.

On behalf of those working within the Child Welfare system as well as the children and youth we serve, I ask that you support HB2505 and the creation of an equity committee, along with the funding for a staff person to help support its work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin C. Donart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robin C. Donart  
Director of Residential Service, Robinswood  
New Avenues for Youth