

My name is Carol Dickey and I live in Portland. As a member of NAMI Oregon, I am here today in support of HB3046.

I would do almost anything for the people I love. I'll bet you would too. Some of the people I love most in the world are my children. My partner and I have five extraordinary children all adopted through the foster care system. Not once in even my wildest nightmare did I believe that one day I would call the Hotline to send one back. But that is exactly what happened last spring after the residential treatment center, where my 11-year-old son had been kept at the State Hospital Level of Care for 38 months, decided to discharge him to home. They provided two months' notice with no opportunity for step-down. They invited us to find our own intensive service aftercare providers and let us know in writing that if we failed to pick him up, they would report us for abandonment.

About a month before his scheduled discharge, in the excruciating agony of looking for options, we received from the RTC the results of our son's most recent testing – a diagnosis of Autism (severity level 2). We received it by mail and were left to deal with it ourselves.

While this new diagnosis opened the possibility of placement within the DD system, we learned that the process would take many months. My son, who is sweet and bright, naturally curious and very, very confused about his life circumstances, expresses his behavioral health challenges in physical aggression most often directed at younger or smaller children. At the time of his planned discharge the longest he had gone without physical restraints or seclusion in more than three years, was 14 days.

With three of our children being either younger or smaller, we had been saying clearly for over a year that we would not be able to maintain safety in our home with him there. *There was no place for our little boy to go.* After exhausting alternatives, I made the call to the Hotline to ask DHS for help. And I hired an attorney.

Upon his discharge last July, my son was placed in a BRS foster home with professionally trained experienced carers – a loving family home with three other children. Three and a half weeks later, that placement disrupted. The other children in the home were younger and smaller, and the family could not maintain safety with our child there. *There was no place for our little boy to go.* Later that day, I picked him up at the DHS office and moved him into a hotel. And that is where he stayed for the next two months. Some nights he was with me or my partner and some nights with a staffing service contracted through DHS.

In October, benefiting from a significantly expedited process, my son moved into a professionally run DD foster home with nurturing providers who are able to help us care for him and to give him the safety and security he deserves.

I would do almost anything to care for the people I love. My son is in a good place and our family is thriving because we could hire an attorney. I am speaking for everyone who can't. In this state, where system of care values are at the fore, no family should have to hire an attorney to have their voice heard. There must be services in place for all who need them, when they need them, for as long as they need them, and treatment that is safe, effective, and appropriate to the unique needs of the child. Most importantly, there must be compassion present at all levels within the behavioral health system. Because isn't that what the people we love deserve?

I urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 3046.