



VOICES UNITED.  
OPPORTUNITY REIMAGINED.

February 17, 2021

House Committee on Human Services  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2505

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

For the record, my name is Chris Coughlin. I am the Policy, Advocacy, and Engagement Director for Our Children Oregon. Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. OCO is the result of the merger between two historic Oregon non-profits: The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon and Children First for Oregon. We elevate data and lived experience to prioritize children and center communities. We continue to connect a community of 115 advocates, coalitions, and organizations through The Children's Agenda, a legislative agenda championing equitable state legislative policies and shared investments to improving the lives of Oregon's children and their families.

**HB 2505: Removing Bias from Child Welfare is a priority on the 2021 Children's Agenda.** We support this bill because in Oregon's foster care system, historically marginalized communities are deeply impacted by racism, ableism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, and other systems of oppression, leading to injustices such as overrepresentation of these communities in the foster care system and underservice of family affirming resources. Data has shown that:

- The percentage of Indigenous children placed in foster care was 2.9 times higher than the percentage of Indigenous children in Oregon's child population in 2019.
- The percentage of Black children placed in foster care was 1.5 times higher than the percentage of Black children in Oregon's child population in 2019.
- Nationally, parents with cognitive disabilities are 50% more likely to have child welfare system involvement than parents without cognitive disabilities.

HB 2505 will work against these inequities by setting up a Child Welfare Equity Committee within the existing Governor's Child Foster Care

## The Children's Agenda

*is a broad slate of equitable investments and policy solutions to meet the holistic needs of Oregon children, youth, and their families.*



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Advisory Commission to review the processes used when making case decisions and recommending actions for revisions to remove bias. This committee will focus on both the prevention of the unnecessary removal of children from their biological parents and the equitable treatment of families involved with child welfare. The committee will also prioritize membership to include child welfare stakeholders who represent historically marginalized communities and individuals with lived experience.

In addition, HB 2505 will expand membership for the Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission from 11 to 13 and provide a Policy Analyst to support both the Commission and the Child Welfare Equity Committee. These changes will strengthen the overall work of the Commission.

The legislative concept for the bill was proposed and developed by current and former foster youth at the Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) Policy Conference in 2020, where youth came up with a total of 10 policy recommendations to improve foster care in Oregon. Time and time again, we have seen that policies created by those with lived experience can impact communities and systems in profound ways.

Individuals and families impacted by child welfare decisions deserve fair and equitable treatment and access to services. We urge you to support HB 2505 and join us in building a more just child welfare system for the state of Oregon.

On behalf of the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chis Coughlin, Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement Director

View the 2021 Children's Agenda at [www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda](http://www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda)