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2505 testimony

House Human Services Committee

2/12/2021

Chair Williams, Vice Chair Leif, Vice Chair Riuz, and members of the committee, my name is Samantha Stephens and I go by pronouns She, Her and They. I'm 23, from Washington county, I fled to Oregon when I was 16, was moved into a previously approved foster home trying to keep the family bond of both of my siblings. One of my older siblings was living independently and my younger siblings were with their abusive biological parent. I am now also living independently and my two younger siblings are rehabilitating after a gruelling two+ years of everyday emotional and physical abuse at the hand of their DHS supported biological parent

Today I am writing to advocate for HB 2505 / removing bias from child welfare decisions. HB 2505 is our opportunity to begin the removal of historical oppression and implicit bias from the child welfare system. Our first step is identifying the bias and open communications with more insight of first hand accounts for a better future, starting today. I am a proud legislative action team member of Oregon Foster Youth Connection and I am here to represent my brothers, who have been a part of the system, considering when my brothers and I were separated, for a while now, and all youths to the likes of us.

My brothers and I have sought help with the system we were MADE to TRUST having been more traumatized by the bias in the foster care system, you could say its parallel to the abuse itself. Our story begins with deception, favoritism and bias against biological families with young adults as a placement option. To approve an abusive biological parent, with multiple unstable environments. Oregon overlooked the stable environments of their young adult sibling, even though it was approved by BOTH the transferring state and originally Oregon, living in a 2 bedroom apartment, with furnishing awaiting their occupants who were, in the end, to never stay.

The system was deceived and deflected into supporting their single abusive, unsupporting Bio parent, instead of getting direct support to the youths as well. The transferring caseworker was even hesitant to turn over the foster child based on Oregon's final placement being a cramped DIY two miniature trailer systems off of 82nd with no supervision. The young adults with preferred placement papers, pushed for a reconsideration fought hard by the abusive biological parent with no new proof, however Oregon still favored their opinion of keeping the abusive biological parent as placement over the preferred biological young adult.

Instead of having to endure the likes of this systematic abuse, we need to identify there is in fact, not only age bias towards these young adults and biological families, its a social bias, and classism. We are all done crying for help, we know what we need and its foundation begins with house bill 2505: Removing Bias from the Child Welfare System. Please help us break this ground for all youths, and their family's futures. This bill is very inclusive considering this affects ALL communities:

Racial and ethnic minorities; Biological families; People with disabilities; LGBTQIA+ communities; and Other populations disproportionately overly represented in the child welfare system.

With your support, foster youths will be able to see the child welfare system in a new light with this need of change being acknowledged. In time, hopefully a youth won't ever be pushed to act on their fight or flight instincts, trying to flee what is truly safe and sometimes needed best. 'We come to you as a family, will you support HB 2505?'