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February 24, 2021

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety  
From: Amy Miller, Executive Director

Re: **Oregon Youth Authority budget (HB 5039)**

Dear Co-Chair Gorsek, Co-Chair Sollman, and Members of the Committee,

Youth, Rights & Justice is Oregon's only non-profit juvenile public defense firm. Every year, YRJ represents over 1200 children and parents in Oregon's juvenile court system. All of our clients come from low-income families. Most have suffered significant trauma and many have physical, mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Approximately 45% are children of color. Because of our unique position handling court-appointed juvenile cases, we often see the same systemic problems and we work to change the policies that contribute to these problems.

Recognizing the overlap between the well-being of youth and families impacted by the delinquency system and the role of the Oregon Youth Authority, YRJ works with the agency in a number of capacities: as a partner, a collaborator, a monitor, and to hold the agency accountable to youth and families.

We encourage funding consistent with the Governor's Recommended Budget and, in particular, the targeted investments of culturally appropriate services for an increasingly diverse population (including gender dysphoria services). Additionally, we encourage continued funding of the legal navigation services contract with Lewis & Clark Legal Clinic that helps ensure youth have access to the courts for purposes of their direct appeal, post-conviction and *haebeas* rights. Last, we encourage consideration of POP 101, funding mental health professionals at MacClaren so that youth with a history of complex trauma, extreme emotional reactivity, and serious mental illness receive the support they need to cope with their symptoms and to begin to heal.

We are particularly appreciative of OYA's partnership on YRJ's legislative priorities: juvenile expunction reform (SB 575 (2021)) and elimination of juvenile fees (SB 422 (2021)). Our goal is to remove barriers that limit a youth's ability to achieve successful adulthood, and we look forward to further collaboration with the agency throughout the session.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

Amy Miller  
Executive Director