

NEW AVENUES *for* Youth

March 1, 2021

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

RE: House Bill 2340

I am Caitlin Potts, a College Access Specialist with Avenues to College, at New Avenues for Youth. I also identify as a former youth who received ILP services in the state of Oregon until I aged out of care at 21 years old.

During the 5 years that I accessed ILP services, I was introduced to a significant amount of useful tools to support my transition into adulthood. I leaned on my ILP coach, and the community I became a part of, who provided me with validation, encouragement, and even strength on the days where I felt depleted. ILP sat at my table, I wasn't a guest at a dinner party, but rather the host, and my voice fell on ears of a team who was dedicated to seeking out a variety of ways to meet the individual needs of every youth who enters their program.

Imagine having autonomy to decide what you wanted your college education to look like from beginning to end, imagine having a plan, and then imagine having that plan stripped from you. Due to the long lasting impacts of Covid-19, many of our students are feeling left behind, as their plans to attend in-person course study has been halted for a year now. Various educational programs are still telling our students seeking higher education that they have to keep checking back to see if their program of study is being offered because, 'no one knows what's happening next' And no one does.

Our youth are facing cut hours, and job loss- leading to food insecurity, and the threat of losing access to housing. These listed factors work to define stability for all humans, and right now, our young people do not have the confidence of these factors being protected because of ongoing implications of Covid-19.

A student that I work with me told me they have had five ILP coaches because of the transitions in ILP- it pained me to have to explain to them the reasons our employees leave, knowing that if we had the funding, our youth would have the stability that they deserve to foster long lasting, and dependable relationships throughout their times in our Independent living programs, and far beyond their time with us.

Our duty is to provide preventative measures so our youth have confidence that the adults working alongside them are going to stick around, their housing is secure, food is accessible, and their support will not come to an end once they age out at 21, rather, a smooth transition into the next phase of their lives.

The expansion of services would serve as the catalyst we need as ILP workers to engage our youth during two of the most crucial times in their lives, adolescence, which is when they often begin using their lens to brainstorm who they want to grow into, and the impact they want to have on their communities.

And then, as our youth navigate the years between 21 and 23, having an ILP team to advocate for their value in this world will instill fearlessness in their subjective capabilities- we are working with young folks who will continue changing the world as they already do- it's on us to give them hope.

Hope that we will enter their lives as providers who are going to stick around. We owe them the certainty that they do not have to lose the support system they begin to trust.

In 2019, I joined OFYC as they lobbied in Salem, Oregon to introduce this exact bill. Our young adults are still surviving, still parenting, still accessing careers, still enrolling in higher education- and their needs have NOT disappeared- they called on us then, as they are calling on us now- to provide the assurance that our programs will be widely available, steady, and permanent.

I am asking for you to do the right thing today, I am asking for you to keep the hope alive for the youth we serve with HB 2340.



Caitlin Potts
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New Avenues for Youth