

Oregon Senate Bill 548

When I was asked to write this testimony, I must confess that I procrastinated. I wasn't in a hurry to put my experiences on paper. It sometimes feels strange to say I am an advocate when, in reality, I don't talk much about my own experiences because it's scary to admit something I haven't wanted to accept as reality and to relive the trauma.

My story of reliving my trauma is not original. The foster care system is a narrative that repeats again and again, with different names attached. One example is the reason I'm here today, to tell you about a practice from my childhood in foster care that still happens to kids today.

Let me explain. When foster youth enter or transition through foster homes, they're given a big black trash bag as a form of luggage. When we were very young, my sister and I entered foster care at the police department before caseworkers found us a home. While we were waiting there, someone gave us a trash bag filled with clothes. The clothes were too big for us but we were grateful to get them, just the same. Even so, the experience left a scar that I still carry today.

It's because the experience was degrading. As I look back now, I realize that my takeaway at the time was that I did not deserve a duffel bag or a suitcase that doesn't fall apart when holding clothes. When I got that trash bag, I was expected to be grateful and to put on an appreciative face.

Members of the committee, how do you think you would feel if YOUR child had to use trash bags to carry their belongings? Not by choice, but in a situation, they

had absolutely no control over. I imagine you would do your very best to protect your child from this humiliation, so why shouldn't your compassion be extended to each and every foster youth in our State?

I ask you to support this bill today so that no child in the State of Oregon is ever given trash bags through foster care. Even when you go for an overnight trip, you don't take a trash bag, yet that is a reality for foster children, only on a bigger scale. I ask you now to take a step toward changing the narrative and giving children the dignity they deserve!