

Submitter: Emily Plec

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB548

Thank you for considering legislation that address a long-standing problem in the foster care and child protective services community. My name is Emily Plec and I run a program called Fostering Success at Western Oregon University. We provide support for foster students seeking higher education opportunities. So many of the former foster youth with whom I interact have "black plastic trash bag" stories. Each May, during National Foster Care Awareness Month, we run a drive on campus to collect new and gently used luggage to give to our local DHS contacts so that they can provide them to the youth they are serving. But the department should not be dependent on philanthropic donations and efforts like ours to give this basic dignity for youth when, with a small amount of additional funding, the state can provide a pathway to greater dignity and decency for these kids.

To that end, I support the spirit of the Senate Bill which requires DHS to maintain and make available an adequate supply of luggage carriers for use in removal cases. The additional reporting requirements appear to me to be somewhat punitive and perhaps not the best use of limited DHS employee time and resources. I recommend amending the requirements so that caseworkers must document instances in which luggage carriers were not available or used (likely due to either budget shortfalls or the emergency nature of the removal) and recommend utilization of the state's Foster Care Ombudsman for the reporting of "trash bag" incidences. Data gathered from caseworker and Ombuds reports can then be used to inform future legislation, if needed.

This Bill is an important step in the right direction and restores dignity to youth in the foster care system. Thank you for your consideration.