



March 1, 2023

To: Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallen, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Re: POP 309

My name is Kim McDonald. I serve as the Executive Director of Mt. Emily Safe Center, located in La Grande, Oregon, serving Union, Baker, Grant, Morrow, and Wallowa County. We have been providing services to children who experience abuse for over 25 years. The primary goal of Mt. Emily Safe Center is to ensure that children (birth to 18 years of age) suspected to be victims of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and/or domestic violence are provided with quality evaluative and healing support services in a child-focused setting.

Mt. Emily Safe Center urges support for POP 309 maintaining the 2021 investment of \$6M in Children's Advocacy Centers. Children's Advocacy Centers have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding, and we are incredibly thankful that our \$6M funding request was included in the Christmas Tree bill last session. As you know, the Christmas Tree bill is just one-time funding, and CACs continually report that their greatest need is highly specialized staff. In fact, nearly every CAC reported using the 2021 funding for increased staff, or increased hours for existing staff.

For example, one Center used the funding to hire a bilingual therapist- a longstanding need for that community. Additional uses include purchase of new

medical equipment, and facility repairs or expansions so that more kids can be seen. Mt. Emily Safe Center used the funding to increase staff hours to allow for reduced assessment wait times and increased capacity for our therapy program as well. Additionally, we have used the funds to purchase a new medical exam table, and make long needed facility repairs to include replacement of our worn-out furnace and cooling system, installation of a new electrical system, and replacement of our ADA access ramp in order to be in compliance with current ADA standards and ensure safe access to our facility.

CACs serve all children regardless of their family's ability to pay, but the current level of state support means many children endure a waitlist for services. Worse, children might not be seen by a CAC at all. Instead, they may be interviewed in police stations or emergency rooms by staff with no specialized training to assess children for child abuse, and without the team of multidisciplinary experts working together - which is a cornerstone of the CAC approach.

Passing POP 309 will move us closer to an Oregon where all children have access to a team of experts who are dedicated to supporting them, stopping abuse, and beginning the process of healing. Please hold the progress you made to protect kids and continue the \$6M investment in CACs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kim McDonald".

Kim McDonald
Executive Director