



March 2, 2023

TO: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety  
FROM: Our Children Oregon  
RE: Support for HB 5514, DOJ Budget

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

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is advancing equitable policymaking and whole-child advocacy statewide to ensure our children and youth—regardless of their race or where they live— have what they need to thrive. We collect, analyze, and elevate data and research that, alongside lived experience, drives conversations in support of Oregon's future.

According to OCO's KIDS COUNT data cards, over 11,600 children were victims of abuse/neglect in 2020.<sup>1</sup> This is most likely an undercount due to the closure of schools and other institutions during the pandemic where abuse and neglect are often reported. In fact, there are findings suggesting that the economic and psychological tolls of the ongoing pandemic have exacerbated domestic violence and abuse prevalence.

**We support HB 5514, specifically the Department of Justice's POP #309, to continue critical funding for Child Advocacy Centers (CAC).** CACs provide essential services by providing child abuse medical exams, forensic interviews, therapy, and additional family support when child abuse is suspected or confirmed. Currently, Oregon maintains 24 advocacy centers that serve all 36 counties. CACs also work closely in collaboration with law enforcement, DHS, district attorneys, schools, and other community partners during child abuse assessments and investigations, which is both cost-effective and demonstrates a model that has shown improved outcomes for children. When a child or youth cannot access a CAC, the likelihood of misdiagnoses is higher, which can result in the youth remaining in unsafe situations or being unnecessarily separated from their family and home.

Children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect deserve to have access to highly-skilled staff who are able to provide evidence-based, trauma-informed healing services. The DOJ POP #309 will provide ongoing funding for CACs. This funding was essential in 2021 for CACs to maintain staff, or even add more, and expand their services. Without this key funding, CACs will struggle to meet the needs of children and families, leading to a lack of staffing, lack of access to their vital services, and long wait times for life-saving exams and interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

By continuing the investment of Children Advocacy Centers across Oregon, we can ensure that children and families are accessing and receiving the much vital care and services they need. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve child well-being across the state. We urge your support of HB 5514.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Ivy Major-McDowall, Policy and Advocacy Director

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

*View the 2023 Children's Agenda at [www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda](http://www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda)*