

Submitter: April Johnson
On Behalf Of: HB 3009
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure: HB3009

Good afternoon members of our Oregon Legislature.

My name is April Johnson, President/CEO of Youth Unlimited Inc.(YUI) located in Troutdale, Oregon. We are an African American culturally specific child placement agency created to support black and brown youth who are in the foster care system.

The purpose of this testimony is to support HB 3009 that would provide longstanding and grounded funding for supportive services to our most vulnerable youth and families. We have had so many minimally funded projects come and go. The gaps just keep widening. The unintended consequences result in Black and brown communities especially being last on the list and those families are least likely to be engaged in higher level service array.

This bill as written is the most responsible and responsive way that we can support youth with acute needs and that keeps their families involved too. Community building that links families and youth to critical services that can help them to thrive and maintain their children in their homes is what we should spend our hard earned tax dollars on.

I'm so tired of not being able to serve the families of the kids that we have in our foster homes. We really get lucky to have maybe two kids out of the 20 served per year who even have a parent still involved. Where are the parents of these youth? Why are we losing parents when serving kiddos? There is something wrong here.

This bill would also give us the capacity in staff compensation that we need in order to work with our kiddo's families in getting them stabilized, engaged in services and readying for the return of their children. Just imagine YUI being able to help our kid's parents get necessary services alongside their children.

We currently have an inadequately funded aftercare mandate for BRS services that is supposed to address this. Again, there is no aftercare for a youth when there are no parents to work with and no staff capacity or adequately funded community based services. The youth will only go to the next higher level of care or better yet a hotel.

If we don't pass this bill then what do we do? I'm willing to roll my sleeves up even further and go home a little later at night. I'm willing to teach. I'm willing to train, I'm willing to do whatever it takes to make things right for our youth and their families. Im asking you to be intentional about adequately supporting Oregon families.

I urge you to consider the passing of HB 3009.

April Johnson, MPA