



To:

Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Anderson and Wallen, and members of the House Judiciary Committee.

My name is Beatriz Lynch, I am the Executive Director of SafeSpace Children's Advocacy Center of the Gorge. We serve Hood River, Wasco, Gilliam, and Wheeler Counties as well as Columbia River Inter-Tribal Police serving Umatilla, Yakama, Warm Springs and Nez Perce tribes. We have been serving children since 2009. In the 14 years we have been open we have seen hundreds of children that have suffered physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, and or domestic violence. Each of these children were provided services in child-friendly setting.

On behalf of the board of directors and the staff of SafeSpace, we urge you to support HB2732 to maintain the 2021 investment of \$6 million in Children's Advocacy Centers. Children's Advocacy Centers have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding, and we are really 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 CAC's 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.

SafeSpace is looking to right size the center. We have increased our service area which means we have outgrown our 1,500 square foot center. The portion of the \$6M funding that was allocated to SafeSpace CAC ensured that we could maintain the level of staffing even while we investing in a larger building. The hope is that if HB 2732 passes so that SafeSpace can eliminate wait time to see child victims of abuse by hiring a medical director and not having to depend on contracted medical providers.

CACs serve all children regardless of their family's ability to pay, but the current level of state support means many children endure long waitlists 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 with out the team of multidisciplinary experts working together—which is the cornerstone of the CAC approach.

Passing HB 2732 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.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beatriz Lynch".

Beatriz Lynch, Executive Director

SafeSpace CAC