

Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission

February 15, 2024

Dear Governor Kotek and Oregon Legislative Assembly:

The Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission (GCFCAC) supports HB 4086 with -4 amendments.

The GCFCAC understands that ODHS Child Welfare's infrastructure and policies do not align completely with responding to child abuse or neglect reports regarding certain types of alleged perpetrators. However, there currently are no systems or processes in place in Oregon to address those reports if ODHS Child Welfare does not. HB 4086 -4 commissions a study of child abuse investigations in the state, with expert guidance from a facilitator, to better understand the gaps, potential solutions, and best practices for responding to certain types of abuse allegations. This is an essential step to ensure our communities and partner agencies can appropriately step in when the circumstances are outside of the typical child welfare response to avoid further trauma to vulnerable families.

HB 4086 -4 also commissions a study to understand Oregon's response to children exhibiting problematic sexual behavior. This is a unique population that needs a unique and tailored response. These children should not be subjected to the investigations for typical child welfare cases. Alternatively, they should not fall through the cracks without support or services, leaving families on their own to navigate complex systems in an attempt to find help for their child. This could cause extreme stress and isolation for families who need connection and support, and potentially lead to more ODHS Child Welfare involvement. However, some Oregon counties, as well as other parts of the country, are implementing practices that we could learn from and implement across the state.

With both populations, Oregon needs the right response at the right time, by the right people. This bill provides an opportunity to address and improve current statute. The solutions are not simple and need to be thoughtful and coordinated. GCFCAC supports the opportunities created by HB 4086 -4 to plan with many community partners before any major policy decisions are made.

Respectfully,
Pamela Heisler, Chair.

The Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission was formed in 2016. Our charge is to study the legal and policy issues, monitor accountability, and make recommendations on improving the current state of our foster care system, to help ensure our children achieve timely safety, permanency, and wellbeing. The Commission is made up of individuals from public, private and nonprofit agencies, organizations, and other entities with experience in, interest in, and responsibility for, the provision of care to children in the foster care system in this state. The Commission's current makeup includes foster care alumni, resource parents, bio parents, service providers, CASAs, attorneys and Tribal representatives.