



February 5, 2024

House Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Supporting House Bill 4140 - funding for Children's Advocacy Centers

Dear Chair Kropf and members of the Committee:

On behalf of CARES Northwest, the children's advocacy center serving Multnomah and Washington counties, I write today in support of House Bill 4140, which would continue much-needed funding for children's advocacy centers (CACs) to provide care and treatment for children impacted by abuse and neglect.

I have had the privilege of being the director of an Oregon CAC for more than a decade, first at ABC House in Linn County and now in the Portland area at CARES Northwest. CARES Northwest is the oldest and largest CAC in Oregon and provides child abuse evaluation, therapy, and support services for approximately 1,200 children per year in Multnomah and Washington counties.

HB 4140 is a bipartisan and bicameral bill that adds critical stability to CAC funding, and makes important new investments that target mental health and behavioral health needs, including:

- **Clarifying that the \$6M investment that CACs received in 2021 and again in 2023 should be considered current service level moving forward.** This funding has been essential in increasing capacity, largely by funding new staff positions. At CARES Northwest, we have been using that funding to expand our Family Support Team and increase outreach to children and families in crisis.
- **Making \$5M in new investments to meet the escalating need for services, with a focus on increasing access to mental health providers.** Real healing happens when children can access life-changing mental health treatment provided by professionals trained in evidence-based, trauma-focused modalities.
- **Funding for hair drug testing,** a service that Oregon Department of Human Services commonly asks CACs to provide but rarely pays for. The number of hair tests conducted by CACs at DHS's request more than doubled from 2021 to 2022, with CACs predominantly footing the bill.

If HB 4140 passes, CARES Northwest will be able to expand its medical staff so that more children can receive medical evaluation and treatment sooner. Right now, we are limited in the number of children we can see each week because we do not have enough medical providers to meet demand. Fewer available appointments result in longer wait times for children to receive critical child abuse evaluation services, which puts them at increased safety risk. Adding another full-time medical provider will result in 350 more children being safe, supported, and on the path toward healing.

We will also be able to continue growing our trauma therapy team, including adding more culturally responsive providers. The number of Spanish-speaking therapy patients at CARES has increased 119% during the past five years, with almost 600 therapy sessions conducted in Spanish last year alone. Adding another bilingual bicultural Spanish-speaker to our therapy team would result in 30 more children each year developing coping skills, strengthening their resilience, and ultimately processing their trauma and its impact.

I respectfully urge your support of the concepts and funding contained in HB 4140. Your support will make tangible differences for the children and communities we serve. Thank you for your kind consideration. Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any additional questions at (503) 276-9000.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JGR', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Jenny Gilmore-Robinson, JD
Executive Director, CARES Northwest