

Date: February 7, 2024

RE: SB 1521

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Wendy Simer and I am a Court Appointed Special Advocate for a 16-year-old, transgender youth.

The youth I advocate for bounced from one non-relative foster home to another for the first six months of care. Following that, he ended up in temp lodging in hotels and then an Airbnb. Temp lodging requires at least two staff on site who switch out every 4- 6 hours. In addition, they require sight and sound supervision leaving the youth no privacy. Temp lodging is not in a child's best interest. Worrying about where you will lay your head each night leaves no brain function for education and other activities that take concentration and persistence. A child in survival mode operates in the "fight or flight" manner. With temp lodging, my youth was expected to spend the day hours in the ODHS family visit room, regardless of his condition. I recall an instance he was fairly ill and was required to be in the visit room during the day.

Once my youth was in the Airbnb, around the holidays, three, strange, males appeared and it was sprung on him (the day after Thanksgiving at 5:00 p.m.) that these three strangers would now be supervising him. The males were employed by Dynamic Life. My youth does not do well with males nor strangers, and this was extremely traumatic to him. In addition, he was told he would have to surrender his phone he used for music and connection to friends, his attorney, and CASA. They also searched his items. It appeared they use the "scared straight" approach and begin with isolating the youth so they must depend on the Dynamic Life team. Attempt to build trust, yet their room contained a lock on the door?

Fortunately, with my youth's attorney's help we were able to end the Dynamic Life prison stay for him before he fled. However, temp lodging and time with Dynamic Life staff cost my youth months of time he can never get back and created irreversible damage. He spent months just trying to survive, while feeling upset and frustrated as he wasn't able to meet the expectations placed on him.

Temp lodging and Dynamic Life are not solutions nor in a child's best interest. We must find a better way to support these vulnerable youth.