

Submitter: Rachael Gold  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3835

My name is Rachael Gold and I work at Metropolitan Public Defender in Multnomah County, which represents a number of Oregon's youth in care. I am also a survivor of five consecutive out-of-state-placement in the "troubled teen industry" between 2007 and 2010. I am writing to express my extreme opposition to legislation that seeks to remove the few protections these youth are provided.

I want you to imagine you are 17 years old. You are thousands of miles away from home and you have been for years. You have been in institutions since before you turned 15, and you just finished your second round of "wilderness therapy" in Utah. There is dirt caked onto your skin and dreadlocks forming in your hair. You already know that the dirt won't wash away in your next shower, or the one after that, or the half dozen after that. Two strangers tell you to get in a van, that they're taking you to your next facility. You consider yourself lucky that they don't blindfold you. This time.

I want you to imagine you are 17 years old. You're alone in a truck stop shower while the transporters wait outside, trying so incredibly hard to scrub the dirt from your hands. Your back hurts. Your hips hurt. Your feet hurt. Your heart hurts. It's been almost three years of this and you have no idea when it will be over. You're turning 18 soon. You wonder if you'll be made homeless on your birthday. You wonder if you'll ever be able to come home again. You hope no strange men burst into this truck stop bathroom and victimize you all over again. You don't get to ask questions. You don't get to call your parents. They have never seen this facility or met these people. They are thousands of miles away, by design.

I want you to imagine you are 17 years old and you're trapped in a system crafted to profit off of your captivity. You have not been charged with a crime, but you have been incarcerated, out of state, until your insurance or family or the government entity accountable for you has been bled dry. You will later learn that your peers who have been charged with crimes and sentenced by a judge to time in an in-state juvenile detention facility had more rights and freedoms, and often received shorter sentences.

Abuse of minors happens when nobody is looking. The moment we send them out of state is the moment we stop looking. These "teen treatment" facilities take advantage of that because they, in fact, don't want us looking. That's why education consultants and other non-familial parties with a financial interest will almost never recommend a young person attend a facility in their own state. I will not take more of the

legislature's time by listing the myriad abuses I personally suffered while nobody was looking, but I would like to note that I began experiencing severe back pain and mobility problems in my teens, far away from home, my family, and medical attention. At 32, spinal imaging revealed three neatly stacked herniated discs in my lumbar spine, which were confirmed to be a result of the inappropriately heavy backpack I was forced to hike hundreds of miles through the Utah wilderness wearing. At another out-of-state facility, I was forced to wear a cardboard, hand-written sign that read "I am a waste of time and money" for more than 90 days. Being on the opposite end of the country, my family had no idea, and any attempt to inform them was met with severe punishment.

I would like to close by taking a moment to mourn the seven friends I have personally lost, all of whom were sent out of state for "treatment" and none of whom lived to 35. In their memories, and to save countless future lives, please vote no on HB 3585.

Respectfully,

Rachael Gold