

FR1ENDS of the CH1LDREN

Portland

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg and Smith, and members of the Joint Ways and Means committee,

My name is Traci Rossi and I serve as the Executive Director of Friends of the Children-Portland, which provides youth in the Portland/Gresham area with a paid professional mentor for 12+ years.

I am here today to testify in support of Friend's \$5 million capital construction ask to help fund the redevelopment of Friends of the Children's facility in NE Portland and the creation of a National Center of Excellence in Professional Mentoring. This request represents the last \$5 million of a \$21M project, which has already received significant support through philanthropic giving, federal funding and City of Portland Clean Energy Fund dollars.

Since 1993, Friends of the Children has been impacting generational change through our paid professional mentoring model, empowering those youth that face the greatest obstacles through long-term relationships with professional mentors called Friends. Friends walk alongside every child and their families from kindergarten through high school graduation—12+ years, no matter what.

We've seen firsthand the successful work of this model. Of the youth that participate, 92% enroll in post-secondary education, enter the workforce or go on to serve our country; 83% graduate high school or get their GED; and 93% avoid the juvenile justice system. We've seen youth served by Friends of the Children go on to thrive—becoming leaders in our communities and successful in their careers. And we know this work has a ripple effect on their siblings, peers, neighbors, and their own children, breaking the cycle of generational poverty.

About 85% of our Portland program participants are youth of color, and 100% are enrolled in the program based on the presence of significant barriers such as experiences in the foster care system or homelessness, attending severely under-resourced schools, or simply living in poverty. While we don't have an exact count of the number of children who could benefit from a mentor with Friends of the Children, population data in Portland and the surrounding counties suggest that there are many more than our current capacity allows.

This \$5 million investment will ensure that Friends of the Children-Portland continues to expand its vision of providing a safe and welcoming environment, with reworked gathering and mentorship spaces, for the youth we serve—many of whose families are returning to the Albina neighborhood following decades of gentrification.

Additionally, we are excited about the opportunities created by the establishment of the Center of Excellence for Professional Mentoring in Oregon. The National Center of Excellence will enhance the collective impact of our state and national network, serving as a state-of-the-art center for training, research and development in the field of professional mentoring. This project will also bring tangible benefits to chapters throughout Oregon, equipping local leaders and practitioners to deliver the outcomes these children desperately need, particularly in rural parts of the state and for communities that are over-represented in systems like child welfare and the justice system.

Thank you for your consideration of this important funding request. By investing in Friends of the Children, the State has an opportunity to invest in a mentorship model with proven outcomes, transforming the lives of Oregon's youth who are facing life's greatest obstacles.

Warmly,

Traci

Traci Rossi

Executive Director

Friends of the Children - Portland

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