

Hello Oregon Representatives,

My name is Shannon Rushing, an Oregonian of 23 years, and I am urging you to not modify the protections Senator Gesler helped put into place regarding mental health care for the children of Oregon.

When I was 17 I was woken up and taken out of my bed at 3am by three people that I did not know while my mom looked on, crying. They told me to pack a bag and that I would be coming with them and did not explain further than that. Then I was moved across state lines into Utah, having been coached to remember the transporters' names so as to not alarm the airport staff that were trying to determine if I was being trafficked as I looked so upset.

I spent 9 months in Utah at La Europa Academy, a place where I endured abuse and neglect and saw much worse happen to others. A place which my parents had to take out a second mortgage to send me to because every month there cost \$10,000, despite the care being abusive and largely unhelpful. I am nearly 31 and still have nightmares about being taken from my family again and being put in that program, not able to leave of my own free will.

I was not allowed to talk to my parents for the first two weeks I was there, and then after that, only at family therapy and for a 5 minute (monitored) phone call once a week. I was not allowed to tell them that anything was wrong or the call would end and I would lose the privilege of being able to speak to the only thing from home I had. I was lucky that they were able to come visit me every three months while I was there, but of the thirty other children I lived with during this time, many families did not have the means/wants to come see them.

I cannot stress enough how scary it is and how damaging it is to be away from one's community and family is as a child, especially when enduring abuse and neglect. It is so important that Oregon build up our mental health care options, including wrap around care, intensive outpatient, partial hospitalization programs, and reimburse mental health professionals fairly, instead of sending them to states with poor child protection laws. We have the ability to build tools here to help children who are struggling, and if not, programs should not be out of geographical reach of their families.

Please remember the reasons that these protections were put into place in the first place. Oregon survivors of these programs that were sent out state sure do, and it has given us relief knowing that if nothing else, children will be within reach of their families when going through such a huge transition period of healing.

Respectfully,  
Shannon Rushing