

Good morning, Representative Levy, Superintendent Dr. Trisha Mooney, Jenny Galloway and committee. My name is Maja Smith, and I am here to testify on behalf of the CARE program, in support of House Bill 2374 and –2 amendment. The Umatilla County CARE program is an amazing and vital resource for the families of our community. From a personal standpoint, the program has been a valuable resource to me for nearly 20 years. Not only did they advocate for me in my time of need, but they also taught me how to advocate for myself and family. I was an at-risk child with multiple factors against me, ranging from parental drug abuse to foster care and teen pregnancy. All of which significantly took a toll on my educational attendance due to having to go from 6-7 different schools between the grades of 2nd and 6th. The only supportive outlet I had that remained consistent was the CARE program. The CARE program helped prioritize my education despite the hardships I faced. The CARE program not only helped support my family along these journeys, but they were the glue that helped hold the “unknowns” together. Whether I needed to find a way to a pediatric appointment or scramble to figure out the foster care system, they ensured I maintained a positive attendance and relationship with my peers. As a young struggling mother, they also assisted me in getting connected with appropriate resources such as WIC, pioneer relief nursery and HEADSTART to ensure my child was fed and enrolled and attending school. With the help of their advocacy my child was able to experience the educational and social experiences he needed. Their support and advocacy resulted in an improvement in my attendance not only as a youth and young college student but also as a mother. I’m not sure what my future would look like without CARE, but with CARE

involvement throughout my life I am now a college graduate and successful case manager within our great state of Oregon. I am also able to provide a healthy and positive home environment that allows my child to excel in school and not have to experience going from school to school as I once did. The positive path the CARE program helped me pave for my family means my son won't have to face the same adversities as I did at his age, as well as provide him with a positive and supportive set of peers to look up to on his way to having great attendance as a young scholar.