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To: Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Lisa Kay Williams, Supervising Attorney
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Re: Support for SB 1533- Oregon's Foster Children's Bill of Rights & Oregon's Foster Children's Sibling Bill of Rights

Date: February 3, 2026

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ) is a nonprofit public defense law firm with more than 50 years of experience representing children, youth, and parents in juvenile delinquency and dependency cases at both trial and appellate levels. Each year, YRJ delivers holistic, client-centered legal representation to hundreds of individuals involved in Oregon's juvenile court system.

YRJ Supports Senate Bill 1533's improvements to Oregon's Foster Children's Bill of Rights and Oregon's Foster Children's Sibling Bill of Rights.

The bill recognizes that rights are meaningless without knowledge and an opportunity to uphold them. The bill seeks to inform Oregon foster children of their fundamental rights and promotes fulfillment of these fundamental rights through unimpeded and unmonitored access to counsel.

The State of Oregon recognizes that children are individuals who have legal rights.

- **Freedom from abuse:** Children have the right to be free from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or exploitation.
- **Basic needs:** Children are entitled to basic needs such as adequate food, clothing, and shelter.
- **Permanency with a safe family.**
- **Education:** Children are entitled to a free and appropriate education.
- **Freedom from self-incrimination:** Children are protected from self-incrimination.

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services have the following additional rights:

- **Least Restrictive Environment:** Children in DHS custody have the right to live in the least restrictive environment that meets their needs.

- **Healthcare:** Children have the right to routine and necessary medical, dental, and mental health care and treatment.
- **Juvenile court participation:** Children have the right to fully participate in juvenile court proceedings involving them.
- **Consult with an attorney:** Children have the right to consult with an attorney privately.
- **Family & sibling relationships:** Children have the right to visit and communicate with family members, including siblings.
- **Cultural and religious activities:** Children have the right to attend cultural and religious activities that align with their beliefs.
- **Enrichment activities:** Children are entitled to opportunities for extra-curricular, cultural, and personal enrichment activities consistent with their age and development.
- **Financial independence:** Children have the right to earn and keep their own money.

Section 5 strengthens and clarifies the rights of siblings in foster care by shifting sibling contact from a discretionary, conditional practice to a presumed and enforceable right, unless a court makes specific written findings that restrictions are necessary for safety. Research shows that maintaining sibling relationships is key to positive outcomes while sibling separation causes harm.

Placing children with their siblings after removal from their parents is crucial for their emotional and mental well-being. Sibling separation increases trauma, instability, and identity issues, while keeping siblings together helps reduce these negative effects and promotes stability. It also increases the chances of successful reunification with parents and adoption, while reducing placement disruptions.

Children placed with siblings tend to perform better academically, experience fewer behavioral problems, and develop stronger social skills into adulthood. They also benefit from emotional support provided by their siblings in foster care.

If siblings cannot be placed together, maintaining frequent visitation is key to preserving relationships, improving mental health, and fostering a sense of belonging and stability. Regular contact helps children feel more socially competent and can even improve their future financial circumstances.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sources:

Or. Const. Art. I, § 12

ORS 419B.090

ORS 419B.875

ORS 339.115

OAR 413-010-0170 to 413-010-0240

American Bar Association. *Sibling Relationships are Sacred: Benefits of Sibling Placement and Contact—Social Science Support for Your In-Court and Out-of-Court Legal Advocacy: A Tool for Lawyers*. 2023. <https://www.publiccounsel.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ABA-Sibling-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>