

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Wolfgang Shepard. I am writing to express my **strong opposition to HB 4059**. As a student of Child Development and an educator, I find this bill to be at odds with everything I have been taught about protecting children.

- 1) This bill seeks to make significant changes to Oregon's child welfare system, including modifying the definition of "threatened harm". This bill proposes that the definition be changed from "**substantial risk of harm**" to "**imminent risk of severe harm**". Abuse does not happen overnight and is not only physical. Psychological abuse and neglect manifest slowly over time, by altering this definition, we are allowing for damage to be done before investigating. 76% of child maltreatment cases reported to CPS were for child neglect. Why would we alter this definition that has protected our children and our future?
- 2) As an educator in training, I have been taught that child safety depends on recognizing patterns of concern, not waiting for crisis-level harm. HB 4059 raises the legal threshold beyond what mandatory reporters are trained to identify, creating confusion and discouraging reporting. This disconnect places both professionals and children at risk by delaying action until harm is undeniable rather than preventable.
- 3) HB 4059 further limits the protections for children by restricting when an investigation is required for an abuse case based on the alleged perpetrator's relationship to the child. Under this bill, an investigation is required only if the alleged perpetrator is a parent, guardian, custodian, or an adult who lives in the home or has access through a relationship with a parent. This restriction protects only the people abusing our children and only harms the most vulnerable population. A child's safety should never depend on whether the person causing harm meets a narrow statutory definition.

The child welfare system is most effective when it can assess risk holistically and intervene early. HB 4059 moves Oregon in the opposite direction away from prioritizing children's safety. I urge this committee to reject HB 4059 and instead support policies that strengthen early intervention, clarity for mandatory reporters, and meaningful protections for all children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Wolfgang Shepard