

Submitter: Grace Anne Larson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4042

Chair Gelser-Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Grace Larson, and I am a survivor of Oregon's teen institutional system. I was sent to a program in Oregon known as "The Academy" in Bridge, Oregon and later transferred to Coral Island Academy in Fiji. I am submitting testimony in strong opposition to HB 4042 because I have lived what happens when oversight weakens, when accountability is optional, and when children are placed in environments that operate without meaningful safeguards.

Unlicensed and poorly regulated placements are not theoretical risks. I was transported against my will and placed into a system where communication was censored, schooling was inadequate, medical needs were ignored, and abuse was normalized as "treatment." When programs operate with limited oversight, children lose their voice and families lose visibility. Expanding the ability to place children in unlicensed or loosely regulated settings will not solve systemic problems. It will replicate them.

I am particularly alarmed by provisions that weaken accountability requirements when abuse occurs. In the programs I attended, staff failed to intervene when harm was happening. Abuse was minimized, reframed, or ignored. When agencies are not required to act immediately after serious incidents, harm continues. Regulations without enforcement do not protect children. Survivors like me exist because enforcement failed. Restraint and seclusion are not benign interventions. Even witnessing restraint can create lasting trauma. The environment I was in relied on coercive control and intimidation under the language of behavior management. Expanding training programs without consistent, trauma-responsive standards risks normalizing practices that escalate rather than de-escalate harm.

Family-based care must remain the priority. Removing guardrails around congregate care length of stay moves Oregon backward. When children are separated from their communities and placed in institutional environments, especially far from home or out of state, their vulnerability increases. I was sent thousands of miles away. That distance made oversight nearly impossible and silenced me for years.

I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB 4042.

Children in state custody deserve enforceable safeguards, immediate accountability when harm occurs, and a system that prioritizes safety over provider convenience.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to protecting Oregon's children.

Respectfully,

Grace Larson

Spokane, Washington

Survivor of Oregon teen institutional programs