

## **RE: HB 4042 — Oppose**

### **Senate Human Services Committee**

**Hearing: Tuesday, February 24, 2026**

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

My name is Christopher Clark, and I attended The Academy, located in Bridge, OR. As well as its sister campus, The Coral Island Academy in Sigatoka, Fiji. Both campuses were under the same ownership stemming from Bridge, OR, Coos County. I'm submitting testimony verbally and in writing with **strong opposition** to **HB 4042** since this will revert vital protections for children in congregate care, eliminate years of progress in supervising these facilities, and weaken the safeguards that exist precisely because children have been harmed when oversight fails. Tens of thousands of children every year are malnourished, psychologically tortured, assaulted, and sexually abused in the absence of oversight. These very things happen in your backyard of Oregon.

All these claims were experienced by me, and I will stand before a grand jury and testify to these traumas wholeheartedly. I was isolated, starved, humiliated, assaulted, and sexually groomed and assaulted in Oregon and Fiji. I do not say this lightly. Honor, integrity, and commitment to my community and country have driven me my entire life. I'm a three-time combat veteran in the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and the entire Middle East. I have the scars and disabilities to prove this. Just like I still have wounds and mental scars from boarding school facilities with minimal oversight. For over two decades, these wounds have not healed, and they will never heal until safeguards are placed that protect young adolescents from abusers hiding in plain sight. I have committed my career to serving these people and currently serve as a state-wide systems-level director, identifying gaps in policy and legislation that protect our fellow neighbors and their families. All the while, I want to heal myself so I can have closure and peace for the betterment of my three children's sake.

**HB 4042** steers Oregon in the wrong direction by favoring the circumstances in which children can be placed in **dangerous and unlicensed settings**, including settings that may be out of state or internationally. When a placement is not licensed and closely regulated, children lose the protection that turns into a lifetime of trauma and is followed by substance abuse or worse. Families lose transparency due to forced, far-fetched lies, and the public loses accountability because they don't know this is happening close to their constituents. Oregon should be a leader in reducing risk and strengthening oversight, not a frontrunner in creating new pathways for child placement in environments where standards are unclear and enforcement is an antiquated idea.

I am especially alarmed by provisions that would all but eliminate safeguards around **restraint and seclusion**. Restraint is not a friendly intervention, as I know all too well. I was kidnapped in a McDonald's parking lot and thrown into a black van by three large men at the age of 16. I received no direction, no food, no bathroom breaks, and felt like I was being sold for body parts the entire 12-hour drive in the middle of the night. It is traumatizing, escalates aggressive fight mindsets, and it can be deadly. Policies and training standards should be consistent statewide, trauma-responsive, and oriented toward prevention and de-escalation—not being expanded in ways that make oversight more difficult or allow lower-quality programs to proliferate. There is no source of record for these events, but tens of thousands of voices will echo the message for you if you listen.

Finally, HB 4042 weakens accountability by removing clear mandates for ODHS to take immediate action to suspend or revoke licenses when an agency fails to cooperate with investigations, when an agency fails to stop abuse even when it is known to be occurring, or when a child dies due to abuse and trauma. I remember seeing rats in the kitchen and having rat feces in our food. I also remember never seeing any inspections happen. The Academy's fire extinguishers were always out of code, there were no health and safety inspections, and no one ever asked how we, the children, were. We were left to the mercy of predators who often smelled like alcohol and drugs. Our families were sold a lemon car of lies, all while we were starving and abused. Regulations without enforcement do not protect children. When accountability is delayed or optional, children pay the price—often for their entire adult lives. Just like I have.

Oregon should be listening to youth, survivors, families, and advocates, especially when providers support a measure, and the people most impacted are raising serious concerns. I can attest, with my right hand on a bible, I have seen or been a victim of this abuse. I've seen friends beaten down, people hung by their feet in the rafters, teenagers thrown onto the ground, then getting rocks thrown at their faces, and ultimately, I've seen and heard "trusted" staff sexually abuse boys and girls. This is not a white lie; this is a fact.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **vote NO on HB 4042**.

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

Respectfully,

Christopher Clark

Survivor in Bridge, Oregon