

Submitter: Crystal Weston
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4042

2/25/2026

Oregon Senate Human Services Committee
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Opposition to HB 4042

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Linthicum and members of the Committee,

I believe that most people truly care about children, but I am writing as a foster parent to express my concerns about this bill because I believe it does not accomplish what it intends to. This is not something we can afford to get wrong.

There seems to be an assumption in Oregon that a category of children exists who do not benefit from having a family. These children who have “complex behavioral health needs” are thought to benefit from—to require—residential treatment. Residential treatment is a black box from this perspective. Troubled children go into the box, and happy, well-adjusted children come out. For foster kids, only then can they be placed in a loving family.

This system serves adults in several ways. Oregon lacks sufficient foster families, but if a child needs “behavioral health treatment” then any consequences of this inconvenient deficiency can be avoided by placing a child in what is defined as a necessary residential treatment. This conceptualization also centers the foster child’s behaviors, which means that their lack of permanency, their trauma, and any failings of the adults who should have cared for and protected them are de-emphasized. Under this paradigm, the behaviors (which are symptoms of trauma and of not having a family) become the actual diagnosis.

Foster children have trauma and neglect that causes predictable difficult behaviors. I have picked a child up after a school fight. I have watched a child get angry and then cry. I have found snacks hidden by a child who has known hunger. I have modeled behavior, set expectations, showed empathy, provided natural consequences, problem solved, explained, and followed up. It takes an incredible effort to do this.

Oregon could pay foster parents an amount that reflects the constant caseworker

demands, appointments, and careful supervision, because it is actually hard to work when you have a foster child. We could pay for daycare and after school programs so working families could be foster parents. We could have more caseworkers and more lawyers, because lower caseloads mean closed cases, which means permanent homes where kids can put down roots. We could have these things.

We instead pay a lot more money than these things would cost to put kids into the black box of residential treatment. I have seen a child come out of a residential treatment facility wearing hospital clothes. I have weaned a child off of dangerous psychotropic drugs. There is nothing magical about this black box, and it means additional trauma and fewer chances at permanency. Raising kids is hard work, and there are no shortcuts.

HB 4042 seeks to bolster the supply of residential treatment to meet a manufactured demand for these services. HB 4042 weakens licensing, which allows unsafe situations. HB 4042 allows youth to be placed in adult settings, which is self-evidently dangerous. HB 4042 also enables non-treatment congregate care without a time limit, so if you don't have a family, Oregon can just give up on you. The child will also be blamed for their own institutionalization because their behavior was the reason.

This policy I believe has a good intent but from my perspective inside the system I ask you to oppose HB 4042.

Sincerely,

Crystal Weston