



VOICES UNITED.
OPPORTUNITY REIMAGINED.

March 1, 2021

House Committee on Human Services
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2340

Chair Williams, Vice Chair Leif, Vice Chair Ruiz, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. OCO is the result of the merger between two historic Oregon non-profits: The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon and Children First for Oregon. We elevate data and lived experience to prioritize children and center communities. We continue to connect a community of 115 advocates, coalitions, and organizations through The Children's Agenda, a legislative agenda championing equitable state legislative policies and shared investments to improving the lives of Oregon's children and their families.

HB 2340: Expanding independent living program (ILP) services for transition-aged foster youth is part of the 2021 Children's Agenda.

This concept was previously developed and championed by current and former foster youth who are part of the Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC). It was also elevated as a priority on the Children's Agenda in 2019 and 2020. The community has recognized the wisdom of investing in legislation that reflects the voices and lived experiences of those in the foster care system and now is the time for our state to demonstrate its commitment to these youth as well.

In 2018, 80% of older foster youth in Oregon "aged out" of the system without a permanent and stable place to live, which is well above the national average of 56%.¹ These youth are on their own; they are not reunified with parents or in a family setting through adoption or guardianship. While most young people can draw on the financial and emotional support of parents or family members to bridge the gap to adulthood, youth who are transitioning out of foster care must do so earlier and with fewer supports. Despite the resilience and potential of these youth, research and evidence show they face greater challenges later on than their peers in the general population in areas such as

The Children's Agenda

is a broad slate of equitable investments and policy solutions to meet the holistic needs of Oregon children, youth, and their families.



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education, employment, housing, and early parenthood.

Oregon's ILP program is designed to help youth transitioning out of foster care gain valuable life skills while establishing supportive relationships with adults and other youth in care. The program provides youth with a coach and services to help them learn essential skills like budgeting, getting a job, finding an apartment, and planning for college, while offering guidance and support as they navigate the next phase of their lives. Unfortunately, ILP providers across Oregon are vastly undercompensated for the costs associated with their services, which jeopardizes providers' ability to sustain current services levels and limits the number of young people who can access these supports.

HB 2340 would help alleviate this issue by investing dollars to stabilize Oregon's ILP provider network so that they can continue being an important resource for transition-age foster youth. In normal times, these services are a crucial part of Oregon's safety net for this population. The pandemic has exposed the urgent need to strengthen this safety net to prevent more young people from falling through the cracks and losing the resources they need to make a successful transition.

Youth in foster care are our children, and it's our responsibility to give them the best shot for success as adults. Your support for HB 2340 will show youth in foster care that their voices are valued and their futures matter. We urge you to join us in supporting this bill.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chis Coughlin, Policy, Advocacy, and Engagement Director

Peggy Ting, Policy Intern

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

View the 2021 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda

ⁱ <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/oregon-fosteringyouthtransitions-2018.pdf>