

2-26-21

Chair Williams and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vera Stouli. I am VP of Programs & Government Affairs with Boys & Girls Aid and President of the Board of Directors of the Oregon Alliance. I am writing to encourage your support for HB2424. The various components of this bill are key to our agency's ability to ensure a highly qualified, well trained workforce to serve children and youth in our care.

Social service agencies serve as training grounds to the human service professionals of tomorrow. As a society, we need to encourage young people to enter social services. We need help removing the barriers that exist, preventing us from growing and developing a well- trained workforce.

We provide shelter, residential, foster care, and adoption services across the state through contracts with state agencies. This bill includes an investment in staff training and apprentice programs for provider agencies. We share a common goal of ensuring child safety. The best way to do this is to ensure the workforce is well trained. Our programs are key to the development of a highly skilled, diverse workforce to meet the various need of children and youth in our community.

One of the significant barriers to recruiting staff is the student loan debt they have incurred. Allowing social service designated staff to qualify for student loan forgiveness is key to attracting and retaining a qualified workforce.

Our workforce is eager to learn and to serve. We need the legislature and state agencies to join us in the development of tomorrow's professionals and ensure children receive the very best we have to offer!

Thank you.