



April 7, 2015

Senator Sara Gelser, Chair  
Members of the Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee

Chair Gelser and Senators,

Children First for Oregon's mission is to make long-term systemic change by advocating for the adoption of policies and programs that strengthen families and keep children healthy and safe. We are a data-driven organization and, as such, cannot ignore these sobering statistics:

- Over 75% of female prisoners in Oregon are mothers
- Over 7,500 inmates in the state are parents
- In 2013, nearly 500 children in state foster care had an incarcerated parent

So how can we begin to move the needle and make real change for these children?

SB 939, with the -1 amendment, can be a start. Explicitly stating that its primary goal is to serve the best interests of the children, SB 939-1 also provides a framework that directs providers on both the goals that will serve the families' interests as well as the critical support services that are the keys to achieving those goals. Additionally, SB 939-1 includes an assessment of outcomes, which will give us the data that will allow the State and the providers to analytically develop future programs.

Children First for Oregon appreciates that our concerns in the workgroup were addressed specifically in the amendment. These include recognizing the part that trauma plays in the familial relationships of the incarcerated, as well as specific programs such as parenting skills training and home visiting. We know that these types of programs are *proven* to change the lives of offenders and their children. In one study, comprehensive home visiting, including parenting classes, reduced the likelihood of mothers having another conviction by two times. Perhaps more importantly, their daughters were nine times less likely to have a conviction by age 19 than the children of those offenders who did not receive the same training.<sup>1</sup>

If we are to make Oregon the best place to be a kid, we must address *all* children and their families, and look to the education, economic security, health and safety programs that will help to achieve that goal. Children First for Oregon supports SB 939 and asks for your support, too.

Sincerely,

Tonia Hunt

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<sup>1</sup> Eckenrode, John, Mary Campa, Dennis W. Luckey, Charles R. Henderson Jr., Robert Cole, Harriet Kitzman, Elizabeth Anson, Kimberly Sidora-Arcoleo, Jane Powers, and David L. Olds. 2010. "Long-term Effects of Prenatal and Infancy Nurse Home Visitation on the Life course of Youths: 19-Year Follow-up of a Randomized Trial." Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 164(1): 9-15