



House Committee on Judiciary
Re: HB 4009

February 14, 2018

Chair Barker and fellow committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 4009. My name is Dani Ledezma, and I am the Interim Executive Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, a coalition of 19 culturally-specific organizations dedicated to cross-cultural, collective action for racial equity. The Coalition of Communities of Color's mission is to address the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism, and inequity of services experienced by our families, children and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.

Families are the foundation of our communities. Children of color, particularly American Indian/Alaska Native Children and African American/Black children, are overrepresented in Oregon's child welfare system at an alarming rate. This is not a new problem. Nine years ago, Governor Ted Kulongoski stated that "too many children of color, particularly Native American and African American children, are in foster care. The time has come for us to move beyond good intentions to intentional action so we can ensure that children with the same needs are treated equitably, no matter the color of their skin." From that statement and subsequent legislation, a Task Force on Disproportionality was formed. Its findings were clear: the overuse of foster care in Oregon has led to dramatic disproportionality that is "a far-reaching problem with exorbitant costs [and] extraordinary and devastating effects."

Although disproportionality has decreased in Oregon over the past decade, more must be done. Department of Human Services data shows that in 2016 American Indian/Alaska Native Children and African-American/Black children were still more likely to be removed and placed in foster care than their peers, less likely to find a permanent home, and more likely to age out without a legal family. This disproportionality persists throughout our state, in both urban and rural communities.

The Children's Bureau, leading scholars, and the real experts—parents and children who have been through the system—agree that one of the best ways to decrease disproportionality is to promote policies that are grounded in keeping children **safely** with their own families.

We are disappointed that the -2 amendments remove the much-needed protection that would decrease the unlawful removal of children from their families. Removal is a serious issue disproportionately devastating families of color, and we need to pass a meaningful solution to





these unlawful removals. By failing to address unlawful removals, we are keeping the focus on foster care instead of preventing children from entering the system.

As to the second half of the bill, with thoughtful -2 amendments, this section provides for an important family-focused protection that will benefit children of color. It allows for children who have not found permanency to reunite with rehabilitated parents rather than age out of the system alone.

HB 4009 will take one small but important step to decrease disproportionality in Oregon's child welfare system. It is our hope that this is just the first of many steps and that the Coalition and our members will have the opportunity to work with this committee to better ensure that all of Oregon's most vulnerable children and families receive the support and services they need to thrive.

Thank you,
Dani Ledezma
On Behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color

