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Statement from DHS Director Fariborz Pakseresht on Governor Kate Brown's Executive Order

(SALEM, Ore.) – The foundation of all the work done at the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) is safety for the children and adults we serve across our five major programs. Our vision for children who cannot live with their families safely is to enter a foster care system where they are protected; get the services and supports they need to heal in a stable, caring environment in their communities, and grow to thrive in adulthood.

Oregon's child safety system, particularly its Child Welfare program within DHS, has been extremely strained for several decades. During the past two years, there have been multiple internal and independent assessments and audits of the agency and its Child Welfare program that all point to the same list of solutions. We have a clear picture of what must be done, we have defined the strategies to correct the problems, we have been building the foundation for the corrective work and we are making progress.

Transforming a statewide child safety system into a robust child well-being system will take time. It requires meeting the demands of today while building the system for the future. We appreciate Governor Kate Brown continuing to prioritize the safety of our children and families. We welcome the additional support her Executive Order provides to increase our capacity and capabilities to improve Oregon's Child Welfare system today and for the future. Keeping Oregon's foster children safe and helping our families heal and thrive takes all of us working together. We look forward to working productively and cooperatively with the Governor's designees.

We have built the foundation for the corrective work and we are making progress by:

- Putting the structure and systems in place to right-size the foster care system by safely reducing the number of children entering the system through community-based supports for at-risk families and reducing disproportionality.
- Stabilizing the Child Welfare workforce by reducing turnover and bringing caseloads closer to the national average so caseworkers have more time to work face-to-face with families, and improving staff training and supports.
- Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children through a series of improvements ranging from consistent screening of child abuse reports to in-home nursing visits.

- Expanding community-based placement options so every foster child is safe and in the care settings that meets their unique needs in Oregon, whether it be family foster care or a therapeutic setting.
- Basing our decisions in research and data, coupled with the professional experience of our staff, to ensure we get to the root causes of problems and take actions that are child-centered and effective.
- Expanding our allies because the Child Welfare program cannot address the factors that bring families to our attention or resolve the capacity crisis alone.

The support from the Governor will provide the necessary resources to help the Department continue and accelerate progress to ensure the Child Welfare program in Oregon achieves the goals we all share.

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