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Statement from Director Fariborz Pakseresht on Wyatt B., et al. vs. DHS Lawsuit

(SALEM, Ore.) – Today the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) was named a defendant in a lawsuit from Disability Rights Oregon and A Better Childhood. The lawsuit calls for an increase in the foster care system capacity to ensure every child has an appropriate placement and to ensure foster children - particularly those with intellectual or developmental disabilities or identifying as LGBTQ - receive the services and supports that meet their needs.

DHS shares the same vision of a foster care system where all children are safe, have the customized supports they need to heal, and are cared for in stable, loving families where they thrive. We take the care of our foster children seriously and work with urgency and diligence to achieve this goal. Over the past 18 months we've been building the foundation needed to balance staff workload, so they can spend more time with children and families and add supports to serve children and families holistically in their communities.

Many efforts are underway to further the same goals of the lawsuit, including:

- A data collection project to identify the types and numbers of placements we lack to meet the needs of our foster children, so we can target our capacity-building efforts where they are needed the most.
- Statewide campaigns to recruit therapeutic and general foster families, and community volunteers to support them.
- Finalization of a long-term, statewide strategic plan to retain and recruit foster families developed by a workgroup of DHS staff and community partners.
- Development of new procedures for nurses and caseworkers for discussing the emotional and health supports available to foster children identifying as LGBTQ.
- An action plan in motion to re-assess foster children being served outside Oregon, including those with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The assessments are to ensure children are getting the services and supports they are eligible for and confirm they are in the appropriate level of care, returning to Oregon those who can be served safely here.
- Working closely with the nine federally recognized Oregon Tribes to reduce and eliminate overrepresentation of Indian children in foster care and to provide them with culturally appropriate services with the help of the Tribes.
- Establishment of an organizational culture with safety and well-being at its foundation.

We will continue to work purposefully with our system partners in addressing the gaps in the foster care system to create a better future for Oregon's children.

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