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Contact: Robert Oakes, (503) 871-4828

## Statement from Director Fariborz Pakseresht on Rebuilding Child Welfare

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The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Welfare program is in the early phases of a long-term effort to rebuild a broken child safety system and we take our charge to help children and families thrive very seriously.

Oregonians need the facts to understand our challenges and the solutions for creating a strong, effective child safety system. They need accurate information to track our progress and to hold us accountable for delivering the positive outcomes we all desire for Oregon's children.

We also want Oregonians to know that we value accountability and transparency. We believe it is our responsibility to provide facts and appropriate context for our programs and our problems. When we make mistakes, our intent is to correct them, not hide them. Our daily motivation is to help Oregonians achieve safety, health and independence and to do that we need the partnership of many stakeholders.

We believe it's important for you to know the following:

### *Most foster children are cared for in families*

Currently, we serve 7,479 foster youth and almost all of them are cared for by foster families. We put a priority on serving children in foster homes with families, with about 5 percent – one of the lowest state percentages nationwide – of children served in group homes or specialized care facilities. We are actively recruiting new foster parents with a comprehensive campaign called [#ShowUpOregon](#).

When we need specialized care, we work with our partners to find those services. For example, at the end of February 2019, 14 total foster youth in Oregon were placed in repurposed juvenile detention facilities in Douglas, Multnomah, Klamath and Josephine Counties that were redesigned to house high-needs teenagers.

When safely available, most of these teenagers attend local schools, receive counseling, make friends, come and go as needed, and get the help they need to rejoin their families and can thrive on their way to adulthood.

See [photos](#) of redesigned residential treatments services for teenagers in Douglas County.

*Foster children are placed in out-of-state facilities only when we can't meet their needs in Oregon*

In the most challenging situations involving children in trauma, we work with families to meet the needs of children. Through the judicial system, we sometimes must place youth in specialized facilities in other states.

The number of children in out-of-state placements has increased because Oregon does not currently have the number of specialized beds available for this population. Today, approximately 80 children are being served out-of-state to get the best treatment for their needs because it's not available in Oregon. A Senate Human Services Committee Hearing is [scheduled April 11, 2019](#) on this subject.

*The child fatality review process is being improved with the Oregon State Legislature's help*

Child safety is a priority for DHS. One important part of our work is the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). This is a team of professionals who meet to review case history and identify lessons learned to inform current practices following the tragic death of a child who received services from DHS. DHS does not hide child deaths. The Department did provide incorrect information on the CIRT process for two children to a reporter and immediately corrected the information when it was brought to our attention. We acknowledge our errors, correct them and learn from them. We're currently working with the legislature to better define the CIRT process and expectations to increase public transparency.

All of our current CIRT information, including background on how the process works, can be found on our [website](#).

As a team, DHS and the Child Welfare system are committed to building the child welfare system for the future. Our vision is serving families and children earlier, in a comprehensive way, to reduce the risk of youth entering the system. We are also working to use data-informed practices where detailed research guides decision-making on how best to serve children and evaluate reports of abuse and neglect calls at our new, centralized, 24-hour Oregon Child Abuse Hotline: 1-855-503-SAFE (7233).

Our agency is working diligently and hand-in-hand with many stakeholders to improve Oregon’s child safety system. The problems in the system didn’t happen overnight and it will take time to correct them. We welcome your support and partnership. There is a way for every one of us to help:  
<https://helpafosterchild.oregon.gov>

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