



# SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Foster youth Bill of Rights recognized by Senate vote** *SB 123A establishes clear requirements for informing foster children of their rights*

SALEM—This morning the Oregon Senate passed a bill that recognizes the basic rights of the state’s foster children and establishes a process for foster children to make complaints about their care. Senate Bill 123A, which passed on a vote of 30-0, requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to create the Oregon Foster Children’s Bill of Rights.

“For a foster child, not knowing you have rights, and not having anywhere to turn when those rights are violated, is like having no rights at all,” said Senator Chip Shields (D-Portland), a foster parent and chief sponsor of the bill. “Foster kids deserve clothes that fit, nutritious food, and the ability to see their family, just as everyone else is able to do.”

Currently, Oregon does not have a uniform system for informing foster youth of their rights or a formalized grievance process for foster youth when their rights are violated. The result of that causes widespread problems for Oregon’s 13,000 foster youth, including keeping many disconnected from their siblings in other foster homes, and prescribing unwanted psychotropic drugs. According to Children First for Oregon, youth in foster care are prescribed psychotropic drugs at a ratio of four to one when compared to non-foster care youth.

“It’s important to direct much-needed funding into critical services that support our most vulnerable. But we also must improve Oregon’s foster care system to be more responsive and accountable so vulnerable children are safe,” said Senator Alan Bates (D-Medford). “This bill will help children in foster care understand their legal rights and the process to express real concerns about their care and safety.”

The Senate Committee on Health Care and Human Services heard heartbreaking testimony from Oregonians raised in the state’s foster care system. These stories came from citizens who had lived in dozens of homes over the course of their life, from children who felt they didn’t receive proper nutrition, and from youth who weren’t allowed to contact their biological siblings. All of them agreed that a Bill of Rights for foster youth would improve the outlook for children in the foster system by increasing awareness of their rights and of the process bring attention to cases of abuse, neglect, or improper treatment.

A coalition of foster youth came together to write SB 123A.

The Bill of Rights ratified by Senate Bill 123A provides for DHS to ensure that each foster child has the ability to complain about unsatisfactory or inappropriate care without fear of retaliation; the right to transportation to court and citizen review board hearings; and, the right to age-appropriate, up-to-date written information regarding how and to whom the foster child may contact with complaints. The bill also requires DHS to set up a hotline for foster children to make complaints regarding their care, safety, and well-being.

Senate Bill 123A will now go to the Oregon House of Representatives for a vote.

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