

August 2007

Dear Friends and Supporters;

2007 is barely half over, and it is already one of the most chaotic and productive in JRP's 32-year history -- chaotic because we moved, and productive because of our successful efforts to reform Oregon's foster care system.

2007 – A Space Odyssey

Enclosed is an invitation to our Open House scheduled for September 26, 2007. Please drop by and see our wonderful new space. All moves are chaotic but we managed to make this move remarkably uneventful. We had a few minor "issues" with email and phones but nothing insurmountable. It is now clear to all of us that we were packed in like sardines in our old building. Our new building provides privacy, adequate meeting space and QUIET.

2007 Legislative Wrap-up

The 74th legislative session may have been the shortest in 12 years, but the legislature took up many issues relating to juveniles, including child welfare and foster care reform, juvenile justice reform, Healthy Kids (subsidized health care for Oregon's uninsured children and a corresponding tobacco tax increase), and funding for public defense services.

JRP worked closely with Senator Kate Brown (Portland), Senator Jeff Kruse (Roseburg), Representative Wayne Kreiger (Gold Beach) and Representative Mike Schaufler (Happy Valley) to educate both Republican and Democratic legislators about the need for child welfare reform. JRP was also fortunate to work with many incoming freshmen legislators who were passionate about improving the lives of Oregon's vulnerable children and youth.

JRP's priority was improving the child welfare system and, in particular, reforming the foster care system. The following is a brief summary of three of JRP's top priorities. All three bills passed the House and Senate ***unanimously*** and have been signed by the Governor:

- **Supporting children in the care of relatives:** SB 282 was introduced at JRP's request. The new law will increase the number of relative foster parents who receive payments from the state to care for children in their

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homes. Oregon has been one of only two states who have denied this support for children who aren't eligible for federal foster care funds. This bill takes a huge step towards eliminating the disparity between relative and non-relative foster parents in Oregon. There is still more work to do because funding was appropriated only for relative foster parents with the lowest incomes, but this is a victory several years in the making nonetheless. SB 282 takes effect January 1, 2008.

- **Making sure the legislature knows how children in foster care are doing:** SB 413 requires DHS to submit a report every other year to the legislature on key child welfare outcomes. JRP worked closely with legislators and state agencies to identify the outcomes that are most important for foster children. SB 413 takes effect on January 1, 2008.
- **Ensuring effective practices to benefit children:** SB 414 is a comprehensive foster care reform bill and the cornerstone of the legislative package. The bill, drafted by JRP's most experienced attorneys, promotes foster care practices that have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on children and families. Those practices include: *placement with relatives in foster care, frequent visitation between parents and children, contact between siblings, face-to-face contact with caseworkers, placement and school stability, and promoting high school graduation.* Through existing DHS mechanisms and court oversight, the bill focuses efforts of the agency, the courts, CASAs and court appointed lawyers on the cases where additional attention to these "best practices" is needed.

As always, we are proud to be a part of this remarkable organization. JRP does so many things that make such a big difference in the lives of Oregon's foster children. We not only provide legal representation for children when they need it the most; we also work on behalf of all of Oregon's vulnerable children to improve the systems and services designed to promote their well-being and keep them in safe, stable homes, whether with their own parents or with the many caring families who choose to foster and adopt them.

Enjoy the rest of the summer!

Warm regards,

Susan Fischer, President
Board of Directors

Janet Merrell
Executive Director

Enclosures