

Senate pres. calls for oversight hearings on foster care

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. -- Senate President Peter Courtney this week called for Legislative oversight hearings into the practices of the Department of Human Services (DHS) with regard to the use of powerful psychiatric drugs by children in state foster care.

A published report Sunday indicated that more than one-fourth of children in foster care in Oregon are taking prescription drugs designed to treat depression, anxiety, trauma and other mental health problems and the state does little to monitor their use.

“The state is responsible for the well-being of these children. We need to determine if agency policies are putting the health and potentially the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens in jeopardy,” Courtney said. “It’s the Legislature’s job to provide oversight of the agency.”

The Senate President said he was appalled by the report which asserted that a 1993 law “passed after the death of a 7-year-old boy in foster care who was being given a powerful antidepressant” is not always being followed. The law requires foster parents to notify DHS when children under their care are prescribed a psychiatric drug.

Courtney said he anticipates that DHS will conduct its own investigation into the allegations made in the report and expects the agency to report to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, chaired by Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson, during hearings in February.

“February’s Supplemental Session will give Senator Monnes Anderson and the committee the opportunity to ask the hard questions and get real answers from DHS,” Courtney said.

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