

WASHINGTON, DC- Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) this week secured critical funding to improve services and advocacy for abused and neglected children in Douglas County. The \$300,000 will go towards a program called Kids in Common. The funding passed the full House as part of H.R. 3288, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2010.

“A perfect storm of high unemployment and increased substance abuse, both triggers for child abuse, combined with slashed funding for social services has resulted in a failure to meet the needs of children at risk in Douglas County,” DeFazio said. “I was pleased to secure funding for this critical program which will help these vulnerable kids.”

Childhood poverty rates are on an upward trend, having increased 14% in 2007 and averaging 50% higher than the rest of Oregon. Unemployment in Douglas County is almost 20% and rising. Both are contributing factors to child abuse. The county is also a designated HIDTA (high intensity drug traffic area), and child abuse statistics historically have risen with increases in drug usage. This is combined with the fact that Oregon’s Child Welfare program failed a federal review in 2001 and 2007. The poor rating was attributed to the lack of frequent and meaningful contact between DHS staff and their clients: children, parents or foster parents. Current caseworker caseloads average 24-31 children, compared with maximum effective caseloads of 12-15 recommended by the Child Welfare League of America. Agencies addressing child abuse have rapidly growing waiting lists of children with immediate, documented needs for advocacy, therapy, respite care and other resources that strive to provide a safety net against abuse.

Kids in Common trains and supervises community volunteer advocates to speak for the best interests of abused children in the court system. Advocates expedite a child's process through the court and child welfare system and strive to assure their placement in a safe and permanent home. Kids in Common also provides services to assess and treat trauma to alleged child abuse victims and their families in a child friendly location. This contributes to the well-being of the child and starts the healing process in a positive environment. They also provide counseling services to mothers who have often experienced abuse in their past. Finally, the organization offers support, education and services to families experiencing high stress to prevent child abuse. This is particularly important during our current economic crisis where many families are experiencing elevated levels of stress.

"CASA, CARES and The Family Development Center are deeply grateful to Congressman DeFazio for seeing this 'Saving grace' through the system," said Evelyn Badger-Nores, Executive Director, Douglas CARES. "Douglas County continues to reel in the hurricane of economic decline. Our poverty level is nearly twice the state average. We have children coming to our agencies who are now in foster care and are reportedly hoarding food because their families had none. Because of Congressman DeFazio's tireless efforts our agencies will effectively impact this growing population of needy children and families."

The Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2010 must now be passed by the Senate before it heads to the White House for President Obama's signature.