

# Ore. pushed to provide services for at-needs kids

By Andrew Selsky  
Associated Press

SALEM (AP) — Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities being attacked and locked up in isolation. This is what some kids from Oregon were subjected to after being sent to out-of-state facilities because of a lack of services in their home state.

They're coming back, and now the state faces challenges to give them proper care.

Currently, 37 children remain in out-of-state facilities, down from as many as 88, Gov. Kate Brown's office said this week.

State Sen. Sara Gelser, a Democrat from Corvallis and chairwoman of the Senate Human Services Committee, said she wants the number reduced to zero quickly.

At the same time, Oregon, which has sent some children to repurposed jails in the state, is trying to ramp up its capacity to serve those who are returning and others with needs.

The Oregon Secretary of State's office said in a 2018 audit that the child welfare system "is disorganized, inconsistent, and high risk for the children it serves."

In a follow-up published in June, the audits

division said "extensive work" remained to improve child safety and that staff and foster homes needed to be added.

Gelser, who has been at the forefront in the effort to bring the kids back to Oregon, said newly released documents show that as recently as last November, the Department of Human Services, or DHS, anticipated having over 120 kids in out-of-state placements by the end of June. The state reversed course amid reports the children face abusive environments in some of those facilities.

Gelser said that this summer, she visited several out-of-state programs serving about 12 Oregon children. She was impressed with the quality of one of the programs, at Forest Ridge, in Estherville, Iowa. It offers behavioral health intervention, drug counseling and other services in a rural setting with 140 residential treatment and emergency shelter beds.

But Gelser said she had "deep concerns" about another facility that she did not name that serves about 80 children, including three from Oregon, and is housed in a refurbished office park.

"Over the course of my two hours there, I witnessed

a physical intervention, a seclusion, and a child restrained in a classroom with a foot-to-chin body sock that left her without the use of her hands or feet," Gelser said, specifying that the children involved were not Oregonians. "I saw disheveled 'bedrooms' that did not reflect a homelike environment and signage that suggested discipline is imposed in ways inconsistent with Oregon policy."

Some Oregon children were housed in Red Rock Canyon School in St. George, Utah. The school is understaffed, leading to violence, sexual misconduct, and an unsafe atmosphere, Utah's Department of Human Services told the school's owners in May. The facility's parent company announced on July 9 it would close.

At Clarinda Academy in

Iowa, where Oregon also sent vulnerable children, some staff slammed children to the ground while punishing them, and kept several students for weeks at a time in a suspension room, according to a report in the *Des Moines Register*, citing state documents.

To better serve the returning children and others, Oregon intends to develop additional psychiatric residential treatment services, hire caseworkers and develop capacity for an additional 15 beds by the end of the year, Brown's office said. Caseworkers will also work more closely with families,

Gelser said those steps are "welcome and critical."

New partnerships with programs like Parrott Creek, a facility in the Portland suburb of Oregon City, raise hopes that Oregon can reach its objectives, Gelser said.

## TRIATHLON: Two Sisters men won their age group


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45-49 age division and 12th overall.

Another athlete with Sisters connections, Erin Kanzig, also shone, as she won among women in the "paddle" triathlon in which the swim was replaced with using a paddle board to navigate the 1,500-meter water section. Kanzig, who was celebrating her 29th birthday, clocked 2 hours, 54 minutes.

Sisters residents Tate Metcalf (3:05:19) and Ross Kennedy (3:26:37) also competed in the Olympic-distance triathlon.

The festival features events spread over two days that include a duathlon, relay races, a half-ironman triathlon, a half-marathon and more.



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**Raising a voice in song...**



PHOTO BY ROB KERR

The Hamiltones were among the many artists who made a big impression at the Sisters Folk Festival.



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