

Out-of-state foster child facilities must meet Oregon requirements

By LAUREN DAKE
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — State Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, would prefer to see all Oregon children who are placed in foster care stay close to home.

But if the state does send them across state lines, the senator is trying to ensure the out-of-state facilities meet the same requirements as those in the state.

Gelser, who became a catalyst for bringing back the foster children placed in facilities out of state, is introducing legislation in the upcoming 35-day session to hold the facilities in other states to the same standards as those in Oregon.

“Basically, we’re saying Oregon will license any program whether in state or out of state,” she said.

Between 2016 and 2018, the number of foster children Oregon leaders sent to residential treatment facilities spiked. Children, some as young as 9, were scattered across 16 different states. Once they were across state lines, Oregon had a difficult time comprehensively tracking the children and their well-being. One child, who was 9 years old at the time, was largely abandoned by state officials charged with her care and sometimes



Oregon state Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, pores over documents related to the state's foster care crisis at her dining room table in Corvallis. Gelser would prefer to see all Oregon children who are placed in foster care stay close to home.

OPB Photo/Bradley W. Parks

drugged in an out-of-state facility. Others have shared stories of assault and neglect.

Gelser's legislation would require any out-of-state facility to allow Oregon regulators inside the facility. The bill would also create other safeguards to ensure the facility meets Oregon's licensing standards.

For example, in Oregon a facility housing foster care children can't restrict access from a trusted guardian, caseworker or court-ap-

pointed advocate if the person wants to see the child.

In Montana, the facility housing the then-9-year-old girl wouldn't let the girl's attorney access the entire facility.

This bill would require placement sites, like the Montana facility, to follow Oregon rules allowing attorneys unrestricted access.

In Utah, where a brawl erupted and one teenager was assaulted two different times by two different staff

members, several children in foster care were placed in the same facility with children who had criminal histories.

Gelser's legislation would keep foster care children with criminal backgrounds separate from other children, except for some cases. Overall, she said, there would be more transparency around who is living in each of the facilities before an Oregon child is placed there.

There are other requirements, too, such as a pro-

hibition against contracted facilities requiring employees to sign nondisclosure agreements. The majority of Oregon youths sent out of state were at facilities owned primarily by one company, Sequel Youth and Family Services. At least one former employee at the company told OPB Sequel had asked him to sign a nondisclosure agreement. Gelser's bill would require regular unannounced visits to the facilities, make abuse investigations public and help states who have children in the facilities communicate more easily with one another.

The bill extends beyond licensing requirements and would also allow any youth who finished high school while out of state to remain eligible for free community college tuition. Oregon's free community college program, known as "Oregon Promise," is only available to those who graduate from an in-state high school. Gelser's bill would extend eligibility to teenagers living out of state who finish their high school requirements.

After news broke in February 2019 that Oregon was sending children in foster care across state lines, Gelser started holding legislative hearings to find out more. Over time, it became evident that Oregon was

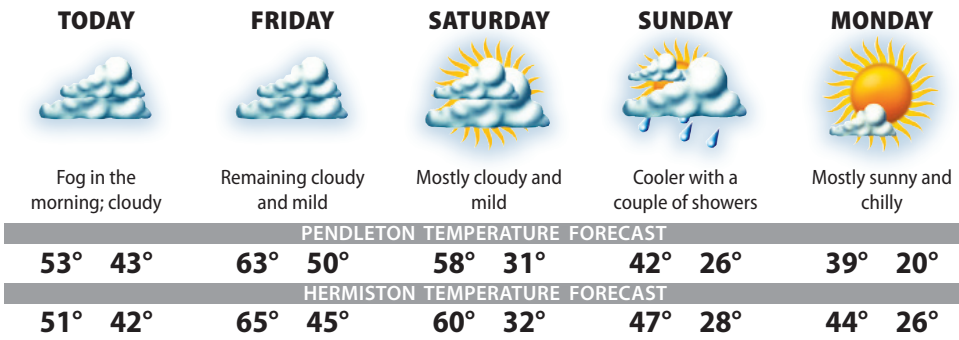
sending foster youth to other states where they could offer little oversight or guarantee of safety.

In July, Gelser made an unannounced visit to Northern Illinois Academy, a Sequel facility that was housing Oregon youths. She said she immediately witnessed a young person who was inappropriately restrained and she soon discovered a 10-year-old who was punched in the face by a staff member. Young people, ages from 9 to 12 years old, were physically restrained dozens of times, sometimes lasting as long as 33 minutes. She found that some youths were placed in the facility for two- to three-year stretches.

Gelser raised alarms that the facility also wasn't a Medicaid provider, and therefore didn't have federal oversight despite presenting as one. Investigators from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services investigated. Not only did they find the facility didn't have an active Medicaid provider agreement, but they also found disturbing conditions they deemed could place "all current and future residents at risk for serious harm."

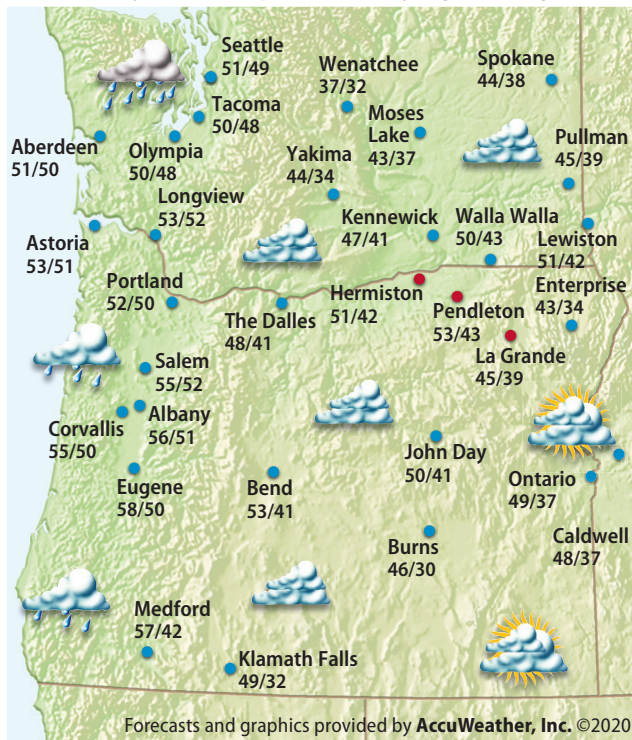
Oregon had three youths in foster care placed at the facility.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	49°	37°
Normals	43°	28°
Records	65° (2018)	-17° (1950)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.12"
Month to date	1.98"
Normal month to date	1.31"
Year to date	1.98"
Last year to date	2.07"
Normal year to date	1.31"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	49°	32°
Normals	44°	29°
Records	61° (2004)	-23° (1957)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	0.24"
Normal month to date	1.20"
Year to date	0.24"
Last year to date	1.53"
Normal year to date	1.20"

WINDS (in mph)

Today	Fri.
Boardman NNE 4-8	SW 6-12
Pendleton SE 4-8	SSW 8-16

SUN AND MOON

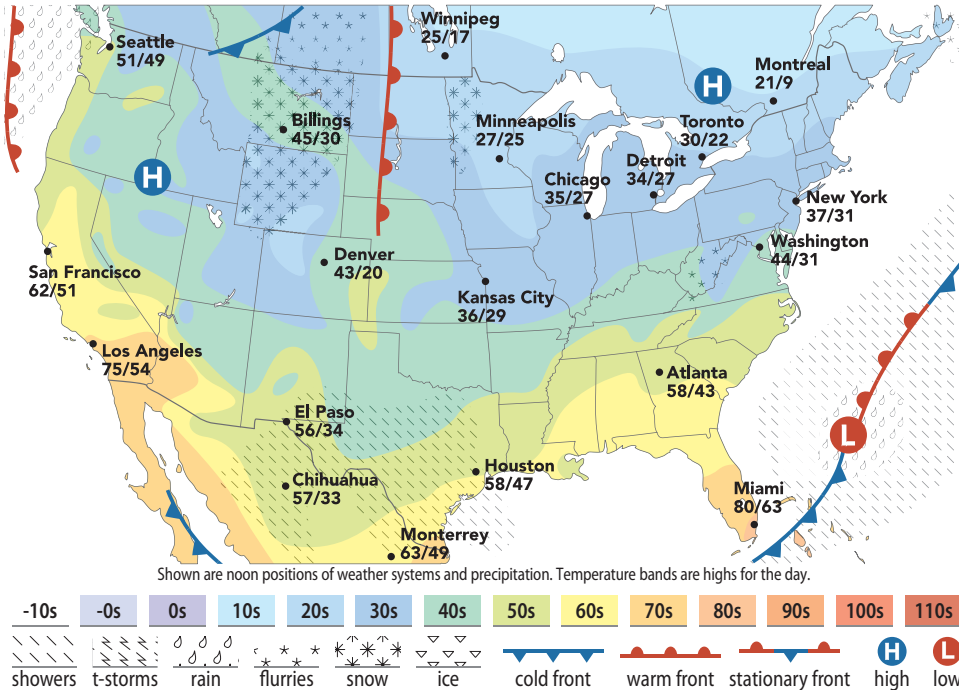
Sunrise today	7:20 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:58 p.m.
Moonrise today	10:16 a.m.
Moonset today	10:56 p.m.

First Full Last New
Feb 1 Feb 8 Feb 15 Feb 23

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 83° in Hollywood, Fla. Low -12° in Clayton Lake, Maine

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Documents prompted ouster of lawmaker

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — The Washington House of Representatives on Tuesday released a trove of documents supporting a recent report that branded an arch-conservative state lawmaker a “domestic terrorist” and got him kicked out of the Republican caucus.

The documents, which cover a period of Republican Rep. Matt Shea's activities from 2012 to 2018, were released by the chief clerk of the state House in Olympia.

The documents included emails, news articles, press releases, law enforcement reports, audio recordings and other items involving Shea and his activities.

The various items released were the basis for a 108-page report for the Legislature by The Rampart Group that was released in December 2019 and was highly critical of Shea's anti-government activities.

The report prompted House Republicans to kick

Shea, who is from Spokane Valley, out of their caucus. Democrats and Republicans have called for Shea's resignation, but he has refused. Republicans say it is up to voters to remove Shea from the Legislature.



Shea

Shea, who rarely speaks to the press, did not return an email from The Associated Press seeking comment. But he posted comments on his Facebook page Tuesday that criticized many of the documents as raising more questions.

“Many of the exhibits are merely biased left wing opinion pieces,” Shea wrote. “The more the facts come out on this, the more it is clear this was a political hit job/label-lynching paid for by us taxpayers.”

In the past, Shea on social media has branded the report a lie and said he will continue to represent the people of his district.

Jay Ponder of Spokane, a former Shea associate who now opposes the

lawmaker's views, said it was good to release the documents.

“Truth and sunlight are the best disinfectants,” Ponder said Tuesday. “Everything is out there now.”

The report commissioned by the state House was released in December and concluded that Shea helped plan, engaged in and promoted three armed conflicts against the U.S. government in Nevada, Idaho and Oregon in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

In particular, Shea's work to organize and urge supporters to attend the 2016 standoff with authorities at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon was branded domestic terrorism in the report by the Rampart Group, a Seattle-based private investigation agency.

Shea refused to be interviewed for the report.

“I have been falsely accused of being a “domestic terrorist” by a private investigator who never spoke to the principals involved in the incidents she described and relied instead on anonymous sources,” Shea wrote recently.

BRIEFLY

EPA announces \$2.2 million grant for drinking water program

SEATTLE — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a \$2.2 million grant for Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington to help identify sources of lead in drinking water in schools and child-care facilities.

The funds are provided through EPA's new drinking water grant program established by the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act Voluntary Lead Testing in Schools and Child Care grant program.

“Ensuring access to clean drinking water and protecting children from exposure to

lead are critically important to EPA,” EPA Region 10 Administrator Chris Hladick said Wednesday in a press release.

“This funding will support our states' efforts to keep children in schools and child care programs safe from the adverse health impacts of lead in drinking water.”

The Oregon Department of Education will get \$1.1 million to provide funding, training and technical assistance to schools and child care facilities to test for lead in drinking water. Under state laws enacted in 2017, all public schools and licensed child care facilities are required to test for lead in all water used for drinking or food preparation.

— Associated Press

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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