

Co-Chairs Monroe and Smith Warner and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Head Start today. My name is Christy O'Neill and I work for Southern Oregon Child and Family Council (Head Start & Early Head Start) as a lead teacher. I am a proud member and President of AFSCME local 2619 representing Early Head Start specialists and support staff, Head Start teachers, teacher and center assistants, family advocates, cooks, and clerical support staff.

I am providing testimony to urge you to raise funding levels for Head Start, Early Head Start and other early childhood education programs like ours. Every day we provide crucial services that benefit the Oregon families we work with directly and our community through advocacy, education, and coaching. We provide research-based high quality learning, nutritious meals, and parenting education for some of our most vulnerable populations from birth to 5 years of age. Our staff adhere to the highest standards of quality included in Head Start's performance standards and framework to prepare children and their families for success in school and life.

But the significant increase in education requirements and best practice standards without a significant increase in funding levels to support highly qualified staff has left us with a revolving door of turnover for all positions. We strive for excellence, but it is difficult when our qualified staff move on to a relatively equivalent position in a K-12 school district for much higher wages. It is more difficult to see when gifted staff leave to work at childcare centers or daycares because they can't afford the degree their position now requires. It is the most difficult to see gifted staff leave to work for wholesale retailers because they earn higher wages there. This is a problem. We need to raise funding levels to provide children and families with the qualified staff they deserve.

Dear members of the committee, I know that budgets are very tight. I believe funding for critical programs comes from an ever-shrinking budget because large corporations have escaped paying their fair share in corporate taxes for too long. Head Start and Early Head Start are valuable assets to our community. I think it's time to make a choice between programs that benefit Oregon families (like ours) and large, mostly out of state corporations.

Respectfully so