

To: House Committee on Education
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Program, Children's Institute
Date: March 4th, 2019
Re: House Bill 2897, Early Childhood Equity Fund

Members of the committee, my name is Dana Hepper. I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Institute. Children's Institute is a statewide organization that advocates for investments in young children that allow every child to reach their full potential. Children's Institute focuses on the first 8 years of life because this is the period in which the most rapid brain development occurs. We support the creation of an Early Childhood Equity Fund as proposed in HB 2897 because this approach is supported by both traditional research and long-standing community knowledge.

Culturally and linguistically specific early learning opportunities support kindergarten readiness.

Supporting native language development strengthens later English language development. Promoting bilingualism increases children's ability to be nimble, quick, and better able to deal with ambiguity. These are key

As Oregon's population becomes more diverse, high-quality culturally specific early learning programs are in greater demand.

In Oregon, 36.5% of babies born are children of color and in five Oregon counties most of the under-five population are children of color. Each baby born is full of unlimited potential, yet we see opportunity gaps already formed by Kindergarten entry. Oregon must develop and invest in culturally specific organizations and services specifically created to work with families of color. This is exactly what the Early Childhood Equity Fund will do.

Culturally specific services are a critical piece of the early childhood system. We envision a future where Oregon invests in young children and their families with a mix of evidence-based and community-driven services. The Early Childhood Equity Innovation Fund is a critical piece of the approach our children and families need to thrive. Latino Network and others have existing programs that serve the 0-5 population and their families in a culturally relevant way and are getting results. Right now these programs are funded by private and local funding. The state can play a significant role in growing and expanded access to similar programs across the state.

We need to continue to grow these investments while doing more to ensure we are truly meeting the needs of children of color, who represent a growing percentage of the state's population. For young children to have rich early childhood educational experiences, this will also mean ensuring our early childhood educators reflect the diversity of our students can meet their diverse developmental, cultural, linguistic, and educational needs of children and families.

We urge you to vote yes on HB 2897 and advocate for the \$20 million in initial funding requested to get started. We cannot wait.