

April 11, 2019

RE: Support for HB 2019 – Student Success Act

Chairs Roblan and Smith Warner and members of the committee,

Children First for Oregon represents the interests of Oregon's almost 875,000 children and believes that together, with communities and leaders across the state, we can build a state where all children thrive.

By working with more than 100 partner organizations, we developed the 2019 Children's Agenda. Several concepts in the Children's Agenda will be part of HB 2019, including both programmatic investments and the need for additional revenue. The targeted investments identified in the months of work by the Joint Committee on Student Success (JCSS), with input from communities across our state, will give Oregon's children the schools they deserve.

Preparation for school begins during a child's earliest years. Ninety percent of brain development occurs in the first five years of life. Work done by the Early Learning Council, early childhood advocates, and the Governor's office have culminated in a call for investments in a series of programs to meet the varying needs of young children and their families. Children exposed to safe, stable environments will be better prepared and ready to learn when they enter Kindergarten, reducing stress on the K-12 system.

Tens of thousands of young Oregon children are currently eligible for effective services they are not now receiving. These include a quality preschool program that responds to their cultural and developmental needs. Some children with developmental delays are currently receiving a small fraction of the recommended services. Many have teachers who will leave since the turnover in some early childhood professions is almost a third each year. The investments listed below will make the difference for these children and their families.

- Infant/Toddler Child Care (Baby Promise) - \$10 million
- Early Childhood Equity Fund - \$20 million
- Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education - \$75 million
- Head Start/Oregon Pre-Kindergarten and Early Head Start - \$101.3 million
- Preschool Promise - \$169.7 million
- Healthy Families Oregon - \$9.8 million
- Relief Nurseries - \$5.6 million
- Professional Development and Scholarships - \$28.8 million
- Early Childhood Literacy (Reach Out and Read) - \$250,000

Together we can build an Oregon where all children thrive.

Our K-12 schools need an increase of at least \$2 billion per biennium to give students smaller classes and more individual attention, mental health supports, and programs to stay engaged in school, all of which can help improve our high school graduation rates.

Oregon must invest in culturally specific programming. School districts should be accountable for reducing the opportunity gap for black, brown, indigenous, immigrant, and refugee students. Integrating community voices, especially those of historically marginalized communities, into the planning process to identify and fund programs at the school district level is an important component of this proposal.

As JCSS traveled around the state, they also heard about the need to improve mental health supports within schools, especially from students. We need to respond to their voices, and ensure that these new investments equip our schools to better support students' mental health needs, and provide better connections to community resources for significant behavioral health needs. We support districts working towards integrating trauma informed practices across schools building on the improved outcomes in the current trauma informed pilots.

These and other targeted investments within HB 2019 are overdue for Oregon's children, and it is very exciting that we are talking about this significant investment in our children. To pay for these needed investments, Children First recognizes the need for a new revenue source dedicated to education. When schools have the resources they need, all students, black, brown, and white, can thrive.

Kat Hendrix
Interim Executive Director