



March 23rd, 2021

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Education Subcommittee, my name is Diane Wilkinson, and I am the Early Learning Program Director for the Nestucca Valley School District and the Early Learning of Tillamook County Consortium. I am writing to offer my support for fully funding Early Learning Hubs in the 2021-2023 budget.

Who are hubs?

- Early Learning Hubs are Oregon's solution to addressing the complex needs of families raising children from pre-birth through age five, with outreach to rural areas like ours providing consistent messaging and resources.

Do hubs help in your work?

- We've found great advantages to the hub system, which moves outside of agency silos and connects the work of Oregon Health Authority, Oregon DHS, Early Learning Division, the broader ODE, private funders, and community-based organizations, like our early learning center and county – wide consortium in Tillamook County.
- Competition for funds in early learning is great, and the hubs help us gain access to those dollars. Sometimes the larger, federal or privately owned entities have multi-level staff that have the time and capabilities that the smaller providers do not. The hub helps those of us with smaller programs, in rural areas find and apply for those opportunities.

Example of this?

In my work in early learning since 1996, the main obstacles I encounter year after year are a lack of consistency in messaging and collaboration. Oregon has many options for families when it comes to childcare and preschool, but without coordination, access to those options can be confusing and frustrating for families. The early learning hubs provide a space where families can go to get relevant information on early care and education in their communities.

What is the ask?

- The current budget contains a \$1.4 million cut which was levied on hubs during a COVID-related special session in an effort to balance the budget.
- Families need coordinated services now more than ever before. BIPOC families have been disproportionately impacted by the virus, women have disproportionate borne the burden of childcare throughout the shutdown, and we have a real risk of undoing the progress we've made.

- In rural Tillamook County, there is a need for high quality early learning and child care more than ever. Support from the hub to maintain and expand services is necessary in this work. Front line child care and early learning workers should be a top priority as our community reopens businesses, schools and we reconnect with those families who have struggled through this pandemic.
- With enhanced investment from the federal government and a healthy revenue forecast, we have a responsibility to fully fund the local coordination that ensures families have somewhere to turn when they need help. The hub helps rural, isolated communities like ours access funding and resources to do this.

What happens if the cut remains?

- A cut to hub takes away a meaningful resource in my work in early learning. It means the bigger organizations that have been awarded early learning funding continues to do so, without collaboration or accountability.
- The cut means our link to the very people we answer to is removed. The resources become harder to access, in a time when child care and early learning should be one of the top priorities for the government and business owners across the state.

We urge your support for full hub funding. Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns.

Sincerely,

Diane Wilkinson

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