

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Education Subcommittee, my name is Olga Acuña, long time educator and chair of the Latino Policy Council of Washington County. Please accept this written testimony in support for fully funding Early Learning Hubs in the 2021-2023 budget.

The Washington County Early Learning Hub is an organization that has expanded wraparound services for children and families that would otherwise not be eligible under the K-12 funding. The Hub has made it possible for hundreds of children birth to five years of age to receive childcare and education. Through the Hub's interface with CBOs, including culturally based non-profit organization, and school districts, our community has begun to deliver programming and services that are designed to closing opportunity gaps. Hundreds of three and four year olds have access to a year round preschool, many Head Start programs have expanded from half days to full days, and babies and their parents are connected to opportunities never before made available.

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. It is too soon to cut this level of support. We are just beginning to understand the impact of the pandemic on families with young children. Families are struggling to care for their children while maintaining employment, and those who faced economic insecurity prior to the pandemic have taken the brunt of the impact of the last year. Families need coordinated services now more than ever before. Families of color have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, women have disproportionately borne the burden of childcare throughout the shutdown, and there is a huge risk of undoing the progress we've made thus far.

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.