



28 March 2021

Senator Lew Frederick and Representative Susan McLain  
Co-Chairs  
Sub-Committee On Education  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Oregon Legislature  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, and members of the Committee:

My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency here in Salem, where we serve people in poverty in Marion and Polk Counties, as well as nine other Oregon counties in some programs. I also serve as member of the Board of Directors at the Marion-Polk Early Learning Hub. I write in consideration of Senate Bill 5513, which provides funding for Oregon's critical Early Learning Hub system.

The Hubs provide vital infrastructure for the early learning system in our region. If the agencies doing the work are the arms and legs of early learning in Oregon, the Hubs are the body and mind of the system. They connect our agencies outside our programmatic universe, and join our collective efforts with the best practices, research, and information provided by state agencies, like the Oregon Health Authority, DHS, and especially the Early Learning Division. They also connect us to business and education leaders, local stakeholders, and various community based and culturally specific organizations. Without the Hubs, the work would fracture along agency lines and vital coordination, connections, research, and collective planning would be lost.

The Hubs also allow our rural areas to more effectively access competitive early learning dollars. The technical assistance provided by the Hubs empower smaller, rural providers to level the playing field and to successfully compete with larger, well-staffed and adequately funded agencies. Yet this vital infrastructure, so critical to our early learning system, is facing a \$1.4 million cut for the 2021-2023 biennium. That cut was created in a prior special legislative session, at a time when Oregon was facing a massive short-fall in revenue. These facts have changed, and so should this budget, since the latest revenue forecast is far, far improved.

The past year has exposed enormous historical inequities for communities of color in Oregon, from the criminal justice system to early learning. Allowing this unnecessary cut to remain in the current budget does not further the cause of racial justice, because it will reduce vital and needed coordinated services at the very moment that Oregon's early learning system is under the greatest pressure as we emerge from the pandemic. COVID will long be remembered as a crisis of the working poor. Our communities of color, in particular, have suffered the burden of the pandemic the greatest. And

women in particular have been disproportionately affected by the statewide shutdown, which devastated Oregon's family-based childcare and drove countless thousands of younger women, especially women of color, from the workforce. As the state childcare system begins to reopen, the Hub system will be needed more than ever, to provide coordination of services across a distressed childcare sector. These changes will be felt most profoundly in rural Oregon, which otherwise lacks the capacity to shoulder the burdens of such cuts.

Our Agency has, for 52 years, supported those in poverty in Marion and Polk counties. The vast majority of those are the *working poor*, who are desperately trying to raise a family in the middle of enormous economic hardship. Many are in danger of eviction. Many have not been able to pay their rent because they have not been able to return to work because they cannot find childcare. Disinvesting in Oregon's critical early learning system, especially in 2021, is the wrong move, for the wrong reasons, at the wrong time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jimmy Jones', written in a cursive style.

Jimmy Jones  
Executive Director