

Testimony
Oregon State Joint Ways & Means Education Sub-Committee
Early Childhood Budget 2021-23
SB 5513
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Participant for the record:

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Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Committee. My name is Martha Brooks. I am the State Director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation, two bi-partisan, non-profit organizations of senior law enforcement officials and business leaders with more than 200 members in Oregon. Our law enforcement members believe that protecting public safety includes promoting solutions and investments that steer kids away from crime and get them started on the right track in life. Our business leaders yearn for a viable educated work force and the key to that achievement is also investing in kids early on in life so that they graduate from high school. This is why **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation support an increased investment of \$127 million in early childhood programs for the 2021-23 biennium.** This investment will build an inclusive, culturally specific & relevant, and developmentally appropriate system that will benefit Oregonians for years to come.

The members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation ask you to increase investments for an early childhood continuum of services that include:

- **\$10 million increase to Healthy Families Oregon to serve approximately 600 more families per year and make critical program improvements.**
- **\$106 million increase to preschool and early learning (\$35.8 million for Oregon Pre-kindergarten, \$64.1 million for Preschool Promise, and \$3.4 million for the Equity Fund) to serve an additional 7,000 children.**
- **Achieve wage parity for Relief Nurseries with \$4.8 million and better serve 3,500 children.**
- **Increase funding to Early Childhood Hubs and invest \$900,000 to establish a new Trial Early Learning Hub.**
- **Expand Reach Out and Read to medical clinics serving a majority of minority and low-income families with \$75,000 for book and reading access services.**
- **\$5.8 million investment towards progress in preventing and eliminating suspension and expulsion for our youngest children.**

- **Increase by \$2 million parenting education programs that expand connections and supports critical for families to thrive.**

It is a continuum of services from prenatal to age 5 that get kids ready for school and for life. Without one service, other services are incomplete. A continued commitment to early intervention and childhood services will continue to build a strong and supportive Early Childhood Learning and Development network.

We all have a commitment to do the very best we can for our kids and make those investments go as far as possible.

And why should we have that commitment? Consider these facts.

- 80-90% of brain development happens between zero and age 5.
- Nearly 50% of all child abuse and neglect cases happen between zero and 5.
- Yearly, approximately 45,000 babies are born in Oregon, yet we serve less than 20% of the 132,800 kids age zero to 3 eligible for home visiting.
- Each year we only serve approximately 25% of low-income children in pre-kindergarten.
- New parents struggle the most and yet we wait until later when stress is the highest.

And yes, quality counts and is critical to success.

Why wait? We shouldn't.

- Returns on investments are the greatest in the early years. For every dollar invested \$3-\$17 is returned in the form of reduced crime, increased graduation rates, reduced special educational and social services programs and more.
- Without a foundation kids stumble again and again on their path to graduation.
- They start kindergarten already behind other kids and never catch up.
- If you want Oregon to increase graduation rates, this is where you should invest.
- If we don't get it right at the start, it costs more; takes longer and sometimes, the damage cannot be un-done.

Investments early can solve a lot of social and emotional problems with kids, and investments early can pay back dividends at all ages – not just age 3 or 6 or 18 or 21, but well into adult life.

Early childhood programs such as Healthy Families Oregon (HFO), Oregon Pre-Kindergarten (OPK), Preschool Promise (PreK Promise), The Equity Fund, Relief Nurseries, Early Learning HUBs, Reach Out and Read, elimination of early childhood suspension & expulsion, parenting education programs and other early childhood interventions, need your continued support. Again, we ask you to invest in early childhood programs as your first investment in a continuum of integrated services.