

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Education Subcommittee, my name is Crystal Rowbotham, I am a Parent of an Autistic Child that just reached the age of 5 in December. I am The Parent Advocate for kids 0-5 on the Jackson County Early Intervention Council and Early Special Education. I am also the Jackson County Parent Advocate for Southern Oregon Early Learning Services Hub In Medford Oregon. But most importantly I am a member of the community that has benefited from the hard work of the hub before I even knew what the hub was. I am here today 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 in our modern society.

Hubs are local councils with the goal of ensuring families attempting to access the variety of programs and services are supported by the community. By doing this they aim to ensure the young children and their families do well for themselves and in their community. In turn, many end up volunteering in the community to help others like themselves. They will help raise the next generation to do well in the community or whatever community they end up in as adults. Many families struggle for a variety of reasons. It is the job of the hub to meet them where they are at and help the organizations recognize the needs and fill them to benefit the community and the citizens that call it home. Hubs collaborate with the organizations delivering programming to ensure that when there is a gap in services, it is identified and filled. While not a lot of people know about the hubs. They are a vital part of the community to ensure the success of families with young children.

Value of early childhood system as whole:

Hubs are also one piece of a larger early childhood system. The Early Childhood system cannot function without stable investment across the board. I support current service level for all early childhood programming, including hubs, and the Early Childhood Coalition agenda investment package. The early childhood system needs to be one of the top priorities for civilization, our nation, our state and our cities. Without a foundation you can not build a sturdy house. The first five years of a child's life are some of the most crucial, yet they are also where most families are left on their own to figure it out. The Hub provides a way to give families information and access to much needed resources. We have k-12 funded for every child to have a free education. I like to see it start at birth. Families won't have to choose who works and who stays home.

Kindergartners will have had enough interaction with their peers that it will be easier to transition to a school system. I would love to see free preschool for every child regardless of income. So many people fall into the gap between low enough income to get assistance and enough money coming in monthly to afford child care. The gap is where most of our families get lost in. the hub does its best. But with more funding or even stable current funding. The gap can be closed just a little bit more each year and more children can have the solid foundation they need to be with their peers. To have good academic basics such as reading and math level by the time they are in kindergarten. Also Early Intervention can help identify those children really struggling

developmentally at an earlier age when it is easier to give them the tools they need to succeed. Too many children are diagnosed later in school because they didn't have opportunities at a younger age and may never get the tools they need to succeed as well as they would have with identification earlier. All this is part of what the Early Childhood system does and why it is crucial to have funding. So many agencies work to help families. Let's make their job easier by funding so they can focus on the families.

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, community-based organizations, Early Intervention, ECSE, WIC Volunteer programs, Bridging Communities and DDS just to name a few of the resources that benefit in our community. The Hubs work in connecting parents and organizations with much needed problem solving to ease the time back to the parents and organizations to do what they do best in helping families. By taking the burden off of the organizations to figure it all out on their own the hub wants the community to benefit from organizations and to run more smoothly in providing for the families with children 0-5. I as a Parent am definitely grateful to the hub for all of the work it has done for medford and my family directly and indirectly by providing a service to the local organizations.

The hub role is meant to be nimble to adjust to the needs of their local community, which is why you hear a variety of different examples of the work hubs do. At their core, hubs ensure providers of early learning services are accountable for outcomes and that services are provided in a cost-efficient manner.

Too often the good work being done is stymied by the lack of coordination which can both identify redundancies and gaps in the system to more efficiently serve families.

Example of this?



For myself as a parent of an autistic child, the hub has always been there for my family but it wasn't until I was on the council I knew how they impacted my family. Right there is a testament to their work in our community. My son got a book from the library when he was born, a program the hub and the library work on. It was his first book. My mother in law died shortly after my son was born from a stroke after surgery. It caused a huge divide in the family system and we had to walk away from my husband's side of the family all together. I myself, do not have any local family and my family can be quite toxic in its own right. We were two new parents trying to make a better life for our son than we had as kids. Breaking generational curses is hard but worth it. But it also

meant my husband and myself were alone to raise our only child. Because my husband's brother is autistic, we knew there was a chance our son could be too. On his second birthday our worst fear was true and he was referred to EI for services. Almost another year went by and he was diagnosed with Autism. We were at a loss and had no idea what to do. We were handed lots of paperwork and continued service plans. But our friend group got smaller because not everyone understands autism and it comes with a lot of time and energy outside of the normal community. Most parents of kids with disabilities ( extra or special needs) tend to find themselves removed from the greater society and put into another pocket of society with parents of kids with disabilities. Too many people in the community still think autistic kids are just spoiled kids when they had sensory issues in the store. So it's easier to have groceries delivered and not deal with the stress of other people. But when you have a WIC card, you can't order online. When you don't have child care, you bring your child with you and hope for the best. It's not fair to bring a child with sensory issues into a store that is going to trigger them with noise, smells and lights. But that was what we did before we understood the effect it had on him. Luckily I send my husband to the store alone to get groceries to keep our son from having a hard time. And I am grateful to have my husband to help with the burden of daily life with disabilities. So many families split up and too many single parents take care of their disabled child because of the amount of work needed to take care of disabled children can tear apart even the best relationships . It is hard to focus on the relationship when you are constantly working with doctors, agencies, therapists, teachers, ei/ecse/ dds, ssi etc to provide for your child. But it can be doable in small pockets of time and understanding that this is the family life now. While it is great to have a community of people who understand your child within the disability community. It can be hard to get together. The schedules are not as flexible because your days are filled with therapies and sensory work. But the events that happen a few times a year were amazing before the pandemic. So many people I had never met or seen before. But going back to my story,while dealing with the loss of my mother in law, and then the loss of what I thought my child would be. We had the loss of my father in law from cancer. Feeling awful, living on one income, we had finally decided to apply for SNAP. the lady at the SNAP office told us about the Family Nurturing Center. They took us in with open arms and helped us get some time in the relief nursery, food baskets and a mom group out on the Henley farm where I could meet other moms like myself, a little down on their luck that just needed a caring place to start to pick up the pieces of our broken hearts. I am grateful for the Family Nurturing Center and we are still part of their programs today. My son attends their Preschool Promise that was months delayed due to covid. But against the odds he has blossomed in ways I never thought possible. The Hub helps Family Nurturing Centers and other organizations like them provide families like mine much needed help in times of crisis and in times of regular need. To help families feel good about their choices to put their children first and how to help those children and the parents succeed. I feel much more successful and confident in my choices for our family than I did 2 to 3 years ago thanks to the community partners and the hub. But with the covid pandemic, the need is greater than ever for our community and myself who hasn't been able to connect with people in over a year and it has worn me down. Having Hubs help families and communities ease the burden of life after covid, life after the fires, and life in the new normal just makes sense. If we lose the foothold of the hard work they provide. We will go even more into a community crisis all over the state.

What is needed from the education subcommittee?

Fund hubs at CSL, \$22.4 million

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. This is not the place to make the cut. We are just beginning to understand the impact of the pandemic on families with young children.

With prior funding we struggled to meet the needs of families facing insecurities prior to the pandemic, with many many families in the gap for services or homeless, reaching them and other vulnerable populations is our mission. We also know those struggling prior to 2020 have taken the brunt of the impact of the last year both financially and mentally. With countless other new families now in crisis throughout the state this is not the time to cut services to vulnerable families or vulnerable young children.

Families need coordinated services now more than ever before.

BIPOC families have been disproportionately impacted by the virus, families with Disabilities have disproportionately been impacted by the virus, parents have disproportionately borne the burden of child care throughout the shutdown, some can not even return to work due to the closure of day care and preschools that were struggling before the virus pandemic. Stuck, if they were lucky enough to qualify, on unemployment and community resources to get by. Wanting to work but have nowhere for their children to go so they can work. Those families that have lost homes and loved ones this last year due to the fires and covid dealing with the mental aftermath need support too.

we have a real risk of undoing the progress we've made and maybe even slip backwards from all the hard work within the community.

With the return of the 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.

What happens if the cut remains?

A cut to hubs means a cut to direct service providers. More families in crisis unable to find a way out. The loss of connection between organizations to provide for families and young children the services they need and even longer for communities to rebuild from the current issues mentioned above and other unseen future disasters.

I deeply and sincerely urge your support for full hub funding. Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns. Grateful to have hub a part of my life and the life of my community