

Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the committee,

Thank you for having me here today, for the record my name is Libby Hoffman here on behalf of the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries. I am the Executive Director for Pioneer Relief Nursery in Pendleton and I am here today to ask for \$4.8 million in ongoing funding in addition to the generous support the legislature currently provides to help Relief Nurseries raise wages for providers.

In 2019, there were 13,674 victims of child abuse and neglect in Oregon. Tragically, 42.1% of those children were under age 6. Children who experience maltreatment are twice as likely to struggle with substance dependency and experience an increased likelihood for negative health outcomes including mental health illnesses; adverse childhood experiences also significantly increase the likelihood that a child will later experience interaction with the juvenile or adult justice system. Uninterrupted, the patterns of child abuse and neglect can continue for generations and present a significant strain on public systems in Oregon.

Oregon's 38 Relief Nurseries offer family strengthening services to address these staggering statistics. Relief Nursery staff partner with families to identify risk factors that increase the prevalence of child abuse and provide a unique set of services to help them build protective factors.

It takes a unique and dedicated individual to do this work. These are not just preschool teachers or childcare providers. These are home visitors. These are social workers. As qualified staff join our mission, it is crucial that our organizations provide competitive wages to retain employees who can truly assist families in growing as positive current and future members of our communities.

The Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries supports living wages for all Early Childhood Professionals and are thankful for the emphasis on wage equity in the Preschool Promise and Oregon Pre-Kindergarten Programs. In rural Eastern Oregon, we experience difficulties hiring and retaining staff who meet the qualifications necessary to complete this work. In an area with growing services, we experience a loss of employees to the other education systems and other industries due to inability to raise wages. Staff who feel strongly about the mission of Relief Nurseries are faced with the need to shift their focus to employment opportunities offering higher wages and increased benefits. This staff loss is detrimental to Relief Nurseries and the families we serve.

The relationship between our teachers and the children and families we serve is foundational to doing this work. The families we serve deal with stressors such as poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, single parenthood and many more, and parents have often experienced past or current trauma. When a teacher leaves for a higher paying job, that means instability for these already vulnerable families.

Relief Nurseries represent a strong public-private partnership, leveraging over \$19 million in private contributions between 2019-2021. In other words, for every dollar the state provides Relief Nurseries, we raise an additional \$1.37.

While this successful model ensures sustained services for families in Oregon; private funding is not a viable option for wage increases. The average Relief Nursery teacher and home visitor would require an increase of 19% to meet the Early Learning Council minimum salaries for Preschool Promise and Head Start teachers with equivalent education. Raising Relief Nursery wages without additional state investment would require Relief Nurseries to cut services to as many as 1000 children in need.

With additional investment, the average cost per child for intervention with Relief Nurseries, will amount to just \$4,576 per year, a mere 10% of the average cost per child in foster care. Our work to strengthen caregivers can ensure children remain in home, with their parent, free of abuse and neglect.

I also wish to convey our wholehearted support for the complete package detailed in the Early Childhood Coalition Agenda. The investment and policy priorities highlighted in this agenda, coupled with the historic investments made in the Student Success Act, are fundamental to eliminating disparities in Oregon due to racism, classism, language, disability, and other forms of discrimination. We strongly urge the legislature to commit to continued improvement in early care, education and family supports for all of Oregon's young children.

Thank you for having me here today and for your continued focus on early childhood programming. Oregon's youngest learners are our future and with early intervention, we can prepare them for success for generations to come.

Sincerely,  
Libby Hoffman