



FAMILY FORWARD
OREGON

Smart policies for today's families.

March 29, 2021
Testimony in Support of SB 5513

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and members of the Ways & Means Education Subcommittee,

Family Forward Oregon is an organization focused on strengthening the economic security of mothers and caregivers. In our work with mothers, families and caregivers over the years, reliable access to high-quality, affordable child care has emerged over and over as one of the most pressing issues facing families all over our state. As a member of the Early Childhood Coalition, we support SB 5513, which would add millions of dollars in investments to early childhood programs during a time of crisis in Oregon.

Our 2021 legislative agenda is guided by the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and families of color, and families and providers historically excluded from policy and budget decisions. According to DHS, fifty percent of single mothers who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) live in poverty. The COVID pandemic hit these communities disproportionately with higher infection rates and the hardest economically from job loss. Investments in early childhood are investments in low-income families, and families who live in poverty. We cannot afford to not examine how the impacts of poverty and the pandemic are experienced distinctly by gender, race, and geography when making these difficult budget decisions.

Mothers also benefit from investments in early learning and child care. Studies show that providing better access to and lowering the cost high-quality care significantly increases mothers' employment rates and incomes.¹

To increase equity and access in our early childhood system and foster Oregon's short and long term economic recovery, we must serve more children and families with early childhood programs that are culturally relevant, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate. Oregon started to make progress with the Student Success Act. Even with these historic investments, most Oregon children who are eligible for services lack access. Federal stimulus dollars for early childhood are largely dedicated to child care, with \$39 billion in the American Rescue Plan. While these funds are essential, we still need the state to make progress on access to early learning and family support programs.

¹ https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1246&context=up_press

Family Forward supports the package of \$127 million in investments to continue to increase access to the tens of thousands of children who are eligible but lack access to inclusive, culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate early care and education.

This package will:

- Prevent suspension and expulsion in early childhood programs with a \$5.8 million investment in professional support for educators.
- Begin the process to create a Tribal Early Learning Hub with \$900,000 in planning funds.
- Increase access to quality early learning for 7,000 children with a \$103.3 million investment (\$35.8 m for OPK, \$64.1 m for Preschool Promise, and \$3.4 m for Equity Fund)
- Provide wage parity for Relief Nursery staff with a \$4.8 million investment to reduce turnover and increase consistency for 3500 children served.
- Increase the number of families served and prepare for future growth in Healthy Families Oregon with a \$10 million investment in slots, wages, data, and staffing.
- Provide early access to books through medical clinics with a \$75,000 investment in Reach Out and Read.
- Expand access to parenting education with a \$2 million investment.

Children ages 0-5 are the most racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse Oregonians, and they are the group of Oregonians most likely to live in poverty. Children born during the COVID-19 pandemic will be entering kindergarten just as we're climbing out of a recession, and decisions made during this session will influence the trajectory of their lives and Oregon's future.

We ask you to commit to continued improvement in early care, education, and support for all of Oregon's young children and families, including families who come from non-traditional backgrounds. It is critical that we center the voices of those most impacted by legislative actions in your decision-making processes. We urge your YES vote on SB 5513.

Sincerely,
Lisa Kwon, Policy Manager
Family Forward Oregon