

April 17, 2021

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward and Rayfield, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is René Brandon. I am the director of the Southern Oregon Early Learning Hub, serving Jackson and Josephine Counties. I am here today to support fully funding Oregon's early learning system, as outlined in the Early Childhood Coalition Agenda. I will briefly share with you the importance of restoring full funding to Early Learning Hubs in the 21-23 budget, as one part of the overall early learning system.

Early Learning Hubs use regional data and stakeholder engagement to identify those children furthest from opportunity and least likely to have access to the services they need.

A few examples of how a cut to the early learning hub in Southern Oregon will impact families:

- 20 Preschool slots in a very rural and impoverished area of Josephine County, where no other preschool opportunity exists.
- 24 infant/toddler slots across Jackson and Josephine County to allow lower income families with infants and toddlers to return to work.
- Funding our region's only culturally-specific family-serving organization. They serve the entire family with language and literacy support, child care, and parenting education. Without hub funding, the number of families served will be greatly reduced or the depth and breadth of their services will be impacted.
- A Regional Needs Screener that has served over 3,000 families with basic needs and housing support during this challenging time of COVID and in the aftermath of the fires.

My **hub colleagues** across the state will face similar challenges.

The governor's recommended budget carries over a \$1.4 million cut which was levied on hubs during a COVID-related special session in an effort to balance the budget.

With enhanced investment from the federal government and a healthy revenue forecast, we urge your support for full funding of our early learning system, including funding hubs at current service level of \$22.4m to ensure every hub is able to fully fund the services to our most vulnerable children and families at a critical time in our history.

Thank you,

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