

April 29, 2021

Oregon House General Government Committee

Dear Chair Wilde, Vice Chairs Leif and Lively, and Representatives Valderama and Zika,

As a supporter of Washington County Kids, a collaborative of over 150 individuals and organizations dedicated to increasing awareness of the need for access to out of school time (OST-early childhood, after school, and summer) programs, I urge you to support the passage of SB299 to add children's service districts to the 28 currently allowed special districts.

Even before the pandemic it was very difficult and costly to obtain quality early childhood, after school and summer care for children. The pandemic has exacerbated this problem, particularly for working women and BIPOC communities of color. We all want to have a thriving economy but that will simply not happen without more support for OST programs to allow parents and guardians to go back to work knowing their children are safe and engaged in positive activities when they are not in school.

Research shows that OST programs promote academic success, higher graduation rates, positive behavior and safety, and good citizenship (After School Alliance, 2014; Vandell, et. al., 2020). Quality child care and after school programs have long term effects on graduation and eventual career success (Parks, 2000). By the time they reach 5th grade children who are economically disadvantaged who do not participate in summer programs average 3 years behind their middle-income peers who do participate (Rand, 2015). A meta-analysis of 213 OST programs found that participation significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance, resulting in an 11 percentile point gain in achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, et al, 2011). In addition, most programs include some federally-subsidized nutrition which increases overall health and the ability to function in school.

These programs also impact the workforce. Women who utilize quality out of school time care have fewer absences and earn more. In addition, the families benefit by reduced costs that free up a significant part of the family's hard-earned income to pay for housing, food, and medical care (McCluskey, 2018).

Funds are inadequate for these programs or may not be sustainable. A limited amount of federal and state funding is available for early childhood programs but proposals are being considered for large increases in proposed budgets. The State passed the SSA act which includes the possibility to fund after school and summer programs but it is unlikely to happen since most districts have opted to use the funds for counselors and decreasing in class sizes. A limited amount of pass-through federal money is proposed but it is unclear how long it will be in place. Most counties do not allocate any of their funds to these programs. Some cities provide limited funding. Non-profit programs exist but they are not available in all geographic areas. Access is difficult for many children due to wait lists, fees, and/or transportation barriers. Some recreation programs exist but they usually require additional fees and they may be difficult to access due to the same barriers. Not all children are interested in recreation programs or able to participate due to physical limitations.

SB299A does not ask for State funds. It only allows citizens to sign petitions to organize children's service districts in a democratic manner to serve the children of their community.

As a concerned Oregonian, I urge you to pass this bill.

Sincerely,
Penney Hoodenpyle
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