



February 15, 2021

RE: HB 3073 – Creating the Early Learning Authority.

Dear Chair Power and members of the House Early Childhood Committee,

The Early Childhood Coalition is supporting HB 3073 to create the Early Learning Authority which creates a state agency separate from the Department of Education and will improve governance for child care and other early care and education programs.

Creating the Early Learning Authority will ensure state investments work for children 0-5 in Oregon and their families. These children are the most racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse Oregonians, and they are the group of Oregonians most likely to live in poverty. This is critical now, as COVID-19 is compounding the effects of existing racism and inequality.

Before the age of 5, a child's brain makes one million new neural connections every second, with early experiences shaping brain architecture. This stage of complex neural, social, and emotional development makes early childhood a critical window in which to eliminate disparities. The critical nature of early brain development warrants the dedicated focus of a state agency, the Early Learning Authority. This commitment is a monumental step toward ensuring all Oregon children have what they need to thrive.

In order for this Early Learning Authority to have the desired impact, Oregon must place responsibility for our early care and education programs, including the state's largest child care subsidy program, Employment Related Day Care (ERDC). This realignment will allow for a more seamless coordination between ERDC and Early Head Start, Head Start/Oregon PreKindergarten, Preschool Promise, and Baby Promise. Greater alignment will create a system that works better for children, families and providers. It also allows the state to be more strategic about utilizing all of these funds to rebuild the early care and education sector from the devastating effects of the pandemic.

As the legislature considers this legislation and, after passage, when the process to establish the Early Learning Authority begins, we encourage legislators, the Governor, and Agency teams to identify ways to meaningfully involve those most directly impacted by this change in relevant decisions made in the transition process.

HB 3073 elevates the importance of the earliest years of children's lives, allows for greater alignment and coordination to make programs work better for children, families, and providers, and creates a critical opportunity to advance equity. For these reasons, we urge the passage of HB 3073.

Sincerely,

Children's Institute
Family Forward Oregon
Nurse-Family Partnership
South Coast Regional Early Learning Hub
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Oregon*
ReadyNation *Oregon*
Oregon Community Foundation
League of Women Voters