



**Early  
Childhood**  
Program  
Western Oregon University

To: House Committee on Higher Education

From: Cindy Ryan, Ed.D., Early Childhood faculty and Chair, Division of Education and Leadership,  
Western Oregon University (WOU)

Re: HB 3561

Date: January 8, 2024

I have both the honor and privilege to work with students in higher education who want to work with our youngest and most vulnerable children and families. The Early Childhood programs at WOU prepare highly qualified diverse early educators and early intervention/early childhood special educators (EI/ECSE) who are ready to support young children and families in Oregon.

Over 50% of our students in our program are culturally and linguistically diverse, post-traditional, and are already working in the field as instructional assistants or early educators. They are passionate, dedicated, and are driven to learn as much as they can so they can do their best for children and families. They need your help.

As I meet with both incoming and current students, financial needs are often at the top of their list of concerns. Students are often working two to three jobs, have a family, and attend classes in the evening, weekend, and online. **HB 3561 is a critical component to support and expand Oregon's early childhood workforce and strengthen behavioral and mental health.** We need to do our best to support these students reach their goals.

Our graduates, and those in programs across the state, will address the early childhood workforce crisis that is happening across Oregon. We desperately need educators to work with infants, toddler, preschoolers of all abilities. We also need a highly qualified workforce that reflects the children and families they are working with. Programs at community colleges and universities are doing what we can to recruit and retain diverse students, but we need your help. We need you to fully fund HB 3561.

For our students, and the children and families in Oregon, I urge your support of HB 3561.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy Ryan".

Cindy Ryan, Ed.D.  
Associate Professor and Chair, Division of Education and Leadership  
Western Oregon University