

Submitter: Susan Szott
On Behalf Of: Dolly Parton Imagination Library
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure: HB2872

RE: HB2872
2023

February 27,

Hearing: March 1, 2023

I am writing in strong support of HB2872, the Oregon Imagination Library project. This bill directs the Early Learning and Care Department to administer a program that sends an age-appropriate, high quality book monthly to children ages birth to 5. The department will work with a national book gifting foundation (Dolly Parton Imagination Library, established in 1995) and with local NGOs to provide the books.

I am a resident of Ashland, Oregon since July 2019. I moved from Michigan to be near my daughter, her husband and two young children who live in Talent, OR. I was a public school educator for 35 years working with children in early elementary grades, reading programs, gifted programs and counseling children, grades k-8. I know the value of pre-reading to school success. When I heard of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, I knew it would be invaluable for the children of Jackson County since so many of them (65%) don't have the opportunity for a preschool experience. The goal of the Imagination Library program is to improve 3rd-grade reading proficiency and high school graduation rates. Research repeatedly demonstrates that early reading programs provide measurable benefits for children and prepares them for future success in school. Statistics show that less than half of Oregon's third grade students meet proficiency benchmarks in reading and, at kindergarten entry, 37% of Oregon's children are unable to recognize a single letter or sound. Early reading exposes a child to rhythm and rhyme, body awareness, colors, letters, numbers, values, diversity, and general language to name a few attributes. In comparison to those who haven't been exposed to early reading, pre-K testing shows a 38% increase in school readiness for children who have been exposed to early reading programs. They have an 82% better chance of mastering basic skills by age 11, compared to 45% for children who are not school ready. It continues from there, if there are no high-quality early childhood experiences then there is a 25% likelihood of dropouts, 40% more likely to be teen parents, and 60% less likely to attend college.

HB2872 will increase the capacity of local affiliates to enroll more children in their area. The cost per child per year is \$26.00 and with thousands of children to enroll in each county this is a huge fiscal challenge for local NGOs to sustain annually. This bill would provide much needed stability as well as opportunity for growth.

Our current young families will benefit from passage of this bill and it will benefit future generations of children. I ask that you support this bill and help it move forward with bipartisan support.

Thank you for caring about our young children.

Sincerely,
Susan Szott, Retired Educator and Community Volunteer
583 Prim Street, Ashland, OR 97520
989-245-0644