

United Way of Lane County

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Noreen J. Dunnells

March 1, 2023

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Marissa Zarate

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice Chairs Scharf and Nguyen and members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

RE: House bill 2872

As the President & CEO of United Way of Lane County I am writing in support of HB 2872 to provide statewide funding for children's access to the Imagination Library program.

I have had personal experience with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program for over 20 years both here in Oregon and in my previous role in central Minnesota where United Way has served as a host of the program.

In Lane County, United Way has served as a sponsor of the program since 2018 with a primary focus on access for rural Lane County children birth to age 5. As you may be aware, our rural communities have fewer resources including library access and this program ensures that children enrolled receive their free monthly, age appropriate book up until their 5th birthday. Currently our United Way is supporting 1,849 children at 50% of the eligible children in rural Lane County. This statewide matching support could boost that enrollment by allowing United Way funds to promote the program more broadly.

Sadly, in Lane County our 3rd grade reading proficiency rates are below 47% and we understand the importance of 3rd grade reading proficiency for future school success. The Imagination Library program provides an on ramp for early literacy development.

Personally, my eldest granddaughter (now 14 years old) had access to this program from infancy and by the time she entered 1st grade she was reading at a 3rd grade level. This love of reading and learning set her up for a positive school experience where she continues to excel.

Thank you and please consider passing HB 2872.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Dunnells", written in a cursive style.

Noreen J. Dunnells