

February 26, 2023

Honorable Committee Members of the House Early Childhood and Human Services,

I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of HB 2872. I am a retired teacher for the Salem-Keizer School District where I worked for thirty years as an elementary classroom teacher and a Title 1 Reading Specialist. Every child can be ready to start kindergarten with the skills needed for success, if there are books in the home and parents have been encouraged to read with their children. Having positive experiences with books at an early age is the number one criterion to getting a great start in school. Not all parents can afford books for their children, nor do they always have the time or know how to make reading fun. As a Title 1 specialist, I was always looking for new ways to create this excitement. I spent many hours creating and launching programs where parents and children of all ages could enjoy reading together.

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) is a proven, simply designed, turnkey program that mails high-quality, age-appropriate books to registered children on a monthly basis, from birth until age five. Books are selected by a committee composed of early childhood literacy experts. They select books that inspire a love of reading and are age appropriate with specific themes such as regard for diversity of people, their roles, culture and environment, promotion of self-esteem and confidence, and appreciation for art and aesthetics. On the book flaps are tips to parents on how to engage their child with the story. For \$25.00 a year, one child receives a book a month, at home, that is addressed to the child. This takes the money concern out of the equation for the parents and allows them more time to enjoy reading with their children.

In collaboration with the Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub (MPELH), I, as Co-President of Alpha Epsilon Chapter of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, have involved my chapter members in helping sign children up for this program in Marion and Polk Counties. We are all teachers who see how valuable this program is and are willing to give of our time and effort to reach all of the 0–5-year-olds that we can. However, lack of funds needed to sustain this program is slowing us down. We don't want to enroll children only to drop them in a year due to lack of funds. In an ideal world, we should be enrolling children as soon as they are born and sharing with parents about the benefits of reading with their children at an early age.

Kacy Bradshaw, MN, NNP-BC, who is the Lead Neonatal Nurse Practitioner in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Salem Health Hospital has submitted a graph (see attachment) showing the number of babies born at Salem Health in 2022. Listed on the graph are ten of the zip codes we are trying to cover for this affiliate of DPIL. Right now, we have four of the ten listed zip codes covered. If we had enough money to enroll all children in the ten zip codes at birth, there would be 2,449 children enrolled in the program for 5 years. If we want all children to be successful in school, then as a community, we need to help all of them develop the readiness skills needed before they enter school. That is going to cost money.

Yes, the \$25.00 a year is an inexpensive program for helping one child, but **HB 2872 and SB 407** would allow for sustainability of the program and increase participation statewide. Today there are 40,693 children in Oregon enrolled. These families/children are enjoying the benefits of DPIL. Let's not leave the other children who qualify out! They need a fair chance to be ready to start school too. The 2.5 million matching funds being asked for in this biennium budget is a modest investment in the lives of children and in support of kindergarten readiness.

Kathy Martell, DPIL Steering Committee Chair for Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub  
Delta Kappa Gamma Society International (Key Women Educators)  
Alpha Epsilon Chapter Co-President 2022-2024