

Submitter: Jim Scheppke
On Behalf Of: Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure: HB2872

Chair Reynolds and Members of the Committee:

I write in strong support of HB 2872 to bring the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program to every preschool child in Oregon.

I was honored to serve as the State Librarian of Oregon for two decades (1991-2011) and during that time one of my top priorities was to have all of the over 200 public libraries in Oregon do everything possible to bring the love of reading to preschoolers in their communities.

Even back then librarians understood what the latest brain science tells us about how crucial it is to put books in the hands of every child, beginning at birth, and to have parents and caregivers read to their young children every day.

In my retirement I have taken on a lot of volunteer work, and none has been more rewarding than to work with the Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub to start-up the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program in Salem and in the rest of Marion and Polk counties. We just began last July and have already signed up over 1,100 children!

But we have a long way to go, and we need your help.

We have had to rely on fundraising and grant writing to get our program going. With every child we sign up we make a commitment to spend about \$26 per year so that they can receive a book every month. Because our funds are limited we have only been able to serve two out of seven zip codes in Salem — the two where there is the most need. We also serve zip codes in Keizer, Independence, and Falls City.

As I have been to community events to sign up children, it has been hard to tell parents that we can't sign up their child because they live in the wrong zip code. It's why we need HB 2872 to provide us with state matching funds to greatly accelerate our fundraising so we can soon sign up every eligible child in Marion and Polk counties.

I believe helping to provide every preschool child with a book every month is the most impactful thing the State could do to raise third grade reading scores which, as you know, are terribly low. Today, Representative Bowman testified that in Oregon only 39% of third graders tested "proficient" in reading in 2022. Well here in Salem the percentage was only 26%!

I know that the Dolly Parton Imagination Library could change this. The science is clear that children who are read to become readers.

With a modest investment of state matching funds we can make that happen. Please support HB 2872.

Jim Scheppke, Salem