



Dear Chairs McLain and Frederick and Members of the Education Subcommittee:

I am Renee Smith, the Executive Director of Family Tree Relief Nursery serving Linn County. Over the last 19 years our organization has worked to support vulnerable families and their young children in Linn County. Our vision and mission have been laser focused on ensuring that each child in Linn County grows up in a family filled with nurturing, safety, and the needed supports to grow into a strong contributing adult.

Over the years through our Therapeutic Early Childhood program, we have supported 1,000s of families with over 3,000 children growing from infants to kindergarteners with over 98% of them remaining living safely with their families. Many of these families experience a substantial number (12-15) barriers and stressors such as substance use disorder, poverty, domestic violence, food insecurity, homelessness and untreated behavioral health that make it hard to provide the nurturing, support, and basic needs for their young children. AND each of these parents express their LOVE for their children and their desire to raise them differently from their own childhoods. Through our support, home visiting, classroom services and parent education we have assisted parents in raising strong, resilient children in new ways and breaking the generational impact of child abuse and neglect.

Even with almost 20 years in service, we continually have a waiting list of families and children who want to receive our services and support, especially in the remote areas of our large rural county. Over the past eighteen months, our community has rallied leaders and service providers working closely together to lay the foundation and hope of bringing a Family Tree Relief Nursery satellite program to the Sweet Home community in rural East Linn County. The satellite will bring close access to our therapeutic early childhood program, home visiting parent education and critical support to families right in their own town, just down the street and not an hour away in Albany. Vulnerable families in this community want the support that we can offer to ensure they have the tools and support to raise their children in a nurturing and safe way.

Alongside our Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries partners, we followed the rules set forth by the Oregon legislature in Oregon Administrative Rules [414-600-0021](#). We have raised \$50,000 in private funding to keep our vulnerable children free from abuse by strengthening families when they are just starting. We believe that expanding Family Tree Relief Nursery services into this rural community is just what the community needs to build a solid foundation for families and improve outcomes for children. Not just today, but into the future.

While the current Governor's Recommended Budget includes funding for the 16 non-profits currently operating Relief Nurseries, it does not include funding for the four new Relief Nurseries that find themselves in our same situation. We support OARN's request to the legislature to stabilize the current Relief Nursery services with a funding level of **\$27,084,868**. We want to draw your attention to OARN's expansion request to add **\$2,400,000** for the four new sites in Coos Bay, Beaverton, La Pine, and Sweet Home.



If additional expansion funds are not appropriated by this legislature, we may not be able to continue with our plans for our location in Sweet Home. That means that Larry and Suzy will not get the vital support they need. Between them, they have 5 children under six. One set of twins that has special medical needs that requires Suzy to be at home with them and one other child that has complex medical issues. When we explored their family stressors, they have 18, they are managing, but only barely. After working with our staff, 2 children are attending our respite sessions and our trained home visitor, meets with the family twice a month to check in, see what their needs and help them get connected to other services and supports in their community. We are helping them navigate the healthcare system, set appointments for their children, and arrange for transportation to the doctor's visits. They are beginning to set small family goals on how they can keep their family on set routines and have plans to meet their goals of having dinner together 3 times a week. We are supporting them in meeting the needs of their children and building their nurturing skills as parents. Their story is not over yet, but with support through our satellite we have hope that their story will be one of hope, not despair. Your support of Relief Nursery expansion will help 100s of Larrys and Suzys. Their story is not unique, hundreds of families across our state face similar challenges and we want to ensure that Relief Nurseries are there to support them.

Again, we ask that this committee add Relief Nursery services to our community. We want to join you and spread Relief Nurseries throughout Oregon, starting with our community.

With Hope,

Renee Smith

Executive Director, Family Tree Relief Nursery

Kim Whitley, Board President

Marsha Swanson, Board Secretary

Rose Miller, Board Treasurer

Fr. Stephen Soot, Myra Ullfers, Adrienne Irwin, Dave Pautsch, Heitho Reuter, Board Members