



EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

T O : Chair Representative John Lively
Vice-Chair Representative Emily McIntire
Vice-Chair Representative Ricki Ruiz
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

F R O M : Sue Miller, Chair, Early Learning Council

D A T E : March 13, 2023

R E : Testimony supporting expanded definition of “early childhood care and education” in HB 3561

SUE MILLER
Chair

ANDREA BELL
*Executive Director,
Oregon Housing and
Community Services*

ANGELA BLACKWELL

KATY BROOKS

PETER BUCKLEY

BEN CANNON
*Director, Higher
Education Coordinating
Commission*

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Director, Early Learning
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COLT GILL
*Deputy Superintendent,
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ANNE KUBISCH

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JAMES SCHROEDER
*Interim Director, Oregon
Health Authority*

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*Deputy Director, Oregon
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Staff
Remy Watts, *Early
Learning Council
Administrator*

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the Committee; for the record, my name is Sue Miller, and I am the chair of the Early Learning Council. I am delighted to be here today in support of HB 3561 and to ensure that our early educator workforce is able to access higher education scholarships.

As you know, Oregon is considered a child care desert, which is defined as having only one available child care slot for every three children. That deficit is even greater for infant and toddler care. A critical strategy for increasing the availability of child care is to recruit and retain the highly qualified workforce necessary to care for our youngest and most vulnerable children.

In the 2019 Legislative Session, legislation was passed to create scholarship and grant programs for students pursuing early childhood care and education degrees. We are very hopeful that these programs will be funded in this current Session and implemented in the coming year.

The bill before you, HB 3561, clarifies that this scholarship program for Oregon’s early learning and care workforce includes students working to become early childhood behavioral and mental health professionals. There is a dramatic shortage of these health workers for young children and their families, which compromises their wellbeing. This clarifying language is a striking example of the cross-sector partnership among HECC, DELC, and OHA that is necessary for us to ensure that our system is aligned and coordinated to support children and families to thrive.

The Legislature has charged the Early Learning Council with coordinating an equitable and aligned system of early learning to assure that our young children enter school ready to learn and that all families are healthy and stable. With significant public input, the Council developed a five-year early learning strategic plan [Raise Up Oregon](#) in 2019, and we are in the process of updating it as we speak.

A unique feature of our strategic plan and of the Early Learning Council is our multi-sector approach with six agency directors serving as ex-officio members of the Council: the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, the Department of Education, the Health Authority, the Department of Human Services, Housing and Community Services, and the Early Learning Division/Department of Early Learning and Care. Together, we have created a plan that prioritizes joint strategies for meeting the needs of young children and their



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families. We need a highly qualified workforce to implement these strategies, and early childhood behavioral health is a critical element of these services.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Early Learning Council's support for revision of and investment in the early childhood professionals scholarship and grant programs.

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