

Monday, March 13, 2023

**RE: Early Childhood Care and Learning Scholarship Program (HB 3561)**

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Ruiz & McIntyre,

**Investments in early childhood are critical to support early brain development, health and wellbeing of children, families, and communities, and the broader economic wellbeing of our state.** Oregon has made progress supporting families so children can reach their full potential. This progress reflects a promise to build a strong early learning and care system that is aligned and connected across state agencies. To build an early childhood system that works for every Oregon child and family, Early Childhood Coalition partners are calling on legislators to take action this session to expand early childhood facilities infrastructure, create accessible workforce pathways, strengthen behavioral health, and reach more children and families with quality early learning and care.

**House Bill 3561 is an important step to support Oregon's early childhood workforce and strengthen behavioral health.** This legislation will expand the state's early childhood scholarship program to include behavioral and mental health services. This is a workforce specialty in early childhood that has extreme shortages and has lacked clear, accessible workforce pathways. Higher education pathways have been least accessible to Black, Indigenous, people of color and linguistically diverse candidates - exactly the professionals young children and families need. **This bill, combined with \$5.2 million in funding proposed by HECC POP 302, are an important step to building Oregon's supply of quality, culturally appropriate and responsive, inclusive child care across our state.**

Attending to higher education access for the early childhood workforce is critical because:

- Child care providers (who are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and women of color) are among the lowest-paid workers in Oregon. In 2018, the

median wage of preschool teachers was \$13.95 an hour, and was \$11.86 for child care workers in Oregon. Average annual wages in child care are [about half the all-industry Oregon average](#). These wages are inadequate to afford college going. As we work on wages, we must simultaneously provide affordable access to continuing education.

- 81% of rural communities in Oregon are designated as child care deserts--meaning those [counties have available slots for less than one-third of the children who live there](#). Addressing the child care crisis requires creating accessible pathways in every corner of the state to solve this crisis.

**We urge your support of HB 3561 and \$5.2 million in HECC POP 302.**

Sincerely,

Adelante Mujeres  
Children's Institute  
Eastern Oregon Child Care Resources  
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids  
Happy Go Lucky Childcare  
Metropolitan Family Service  
Multnomah County  
Nurse-Family Partnership  
Oregon Community Foundation  
ORAEYC  
ReadyNation  
Reimagine Oregon