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REGIONAL OFFICES

Baker, Crook,
Deschutes, Gilliam,
Grant, Harney, Hood
River, Jefferson, Morrow,
Umatilla, Wallowa &
Wasco
541-797-7726

Benton, Lane, & Linn
541-600-8035

Children's Book Bank at
SMART Reading
(warehouse)
503-616-3981

Clackamas, Multnomah,
& Washington
971-634-1628

Clatsop, Columbia,
Lincoln, Marion, Polk,
Tillamook, & Yamhill
503-391-8423

Coos & Curry
541-266-7476

Douglas
541-672-6477

Jackson & Josephine
541-734-5628

Klamath & Lake
541-273-2424

March 31, 2023

Courtney Neron, Chair
House Committee on Education
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, & Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your work and careful consideration of legislation that will improve early literacy across Oregon. The pandemic caused significant and irreversible interruptions in learning for our state's youngest readers. Ensuring that we're putting students on a path to literacy and learning success is more important than ever, and SMART Reading – a part of Oregon schools for more than 30 years – is poised to support our state in this critical endeavor.

I know we all agree that reading is the gateway to learning and opportunity for Oregon's kids. Without it, kids are less likely to graduate high school, find employment, or successfully avoid other hardships like poverty, homelessness, hunger, and other forms of injustice. Lower literacy rates don't just hurt individual children; they hurt us all. They impact the future health and prosperity of Oregon. They add strain on social and health services, impede our economic growth, and weaken our workforce.

Oregon's literacy rates were unacceptable before the pandemic. Now, the situation is even more alarming, with fewer than half of Oregon third-graders reading at grade level. What's more, education gaps for students from historically marginalized communities have widened. House Bill proposes important and urgent action to improve early literacy rates and address this crisis in our state. Importantly, this bill recognizes that successful early literacy strategies include both schools *and* communities.

Community-based organizations like SMART Reading supplement early childhood literacy instruction in important, evidenced-based ways that improve literacy outcomes for kids. SMART comes alongside Oregon's highest need schools and early learning providers to provide two critical ingredients in literacy success: shared reading support and access to books. We accomplish our

mission by mobilizing thousands of volunteers to serve over 15,000 young children in 32 counties and three Tribal nations across Oregon. Throughout our 31-year history, we've given students over 4 million high-quality, inclusive books to build their home libraries.

SMART has the statewide infrastructure and time-tested, research-based delivery models to support the state in improving our children's early literacy rates. We are hopeful that this bill moves forward and, as funding decisions are made, we encourage our legislators to remember that SMART and other community-based organizations are eager to bring our networks, resources and expertise to bear to ensure more Oregon kids are succeeding with reading.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessica Bowersox". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Jessica Bowersox
Executive Director
SMART Reading