



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor



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Dear Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and House Early Childhood and Human Services Committee Members,

Thank you for holding the public hearing on HB 2811, the Imagination Library of Oregon, a program that encourages the love of books and reading for our state's youngest learners and their families. We know that increasing early literacy has a significant impact on a child's development and social skills, and it also enables parents and guardians to be partners in their children's learning. We appreciate the leadership of Governor Kotek and the Legislature in 2023, for naming early literacy as a top priority and leading efforts to close address disparities and providing resources for the Department of Early Learning and Care.

In May 2024, the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) was launched as a book gifting program that mails free, high-quality, age-appropriate books to children from birth to age five, regardless of family income. The program has been widely successful:

- 56 Local Program Partners across all 36 Oregon counties partner with DPIL to register children, promote the program in their communities, and fundraise to cover the costs of books and mailing.
- 16% increase in enrollment since launching May 2024
- 29% of eligible children in Oregon (roughly 63,036 of approximately 215,756 children aged 0-5) receive books from DPIL.
- 35 of 36 counties have full program coverage, meaning any family in any zip code in those counties can enroll their children and efforts are underway in the remaining county (Douglas) to fully cover two remaining zip codes.

## Background

During the 2023 legislative session, HB 2872 was introduced to establish a statewide Imagination Library of Oregon Program. This bill directed the Department of Early Learning and Care (DEL.C) to implement the statewide book gifting program through contracting with by entering into a contract with a nonprofit entity. The bill did not pass, but the Legislature allocated \$1.7 million in General Funds to DEL.C for the expansion of the Imagination Library

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*The Mission of the Department of Early Learning and Care fosters coordinated, culturally appropriate, and family-centered services that recognize and respect the strengths and needs of all children, families, and early learning and care professionals. Our Vision is that all children, families, early care and education professionals, and communities are supported and empowered to thrive.*



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Program for the 2023-25 biennium through SB 5506. Additionally, two leadership roles were created to oversee the statewide expansion. Using these funds, DELC launched the Imagination Library of Oregon by contracting directly with The Dollywood Foundation, beginning a state match of 50% of the total cost of the books and mailing with the intention of expanding coverage to regions of the state where access to free books through DPIL has been unavailable.

## **The need for HB 2811**

DELC has been administering the program since 2023, and is seeking statutory authority to officially implement the Imagination Library of Oregon Program in alignment with the designated funds.

## **The bill:**

- Establishes the Imagination Library of Oregon Program.
- Authorizes the Department of Early Learning and Care to contract with a nonprofit entity to administer the Imagination Library of Oregon program, including:
  - Providing the 50% match from the State for books and mailing
  - Promoting access to the program
  - Establishing community donations to expand the program
- Creates an Oregon Imagination Library Account within the Department of Early Learning and Care for funding the program.

We encourage your support on the bill so that we can continue promoting early literacy among Oregon's youngest readers.

Alyssa Chatterjee  
Early Learning System Director  
Department of Early Learning and Care

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