

January 30, 2025

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

I am writing to express our support for HB 2811, establishing the Imagination Library of Oregon Program.

Receiving free, high-quality books from birth to age five fosters a love of reading at an early age and lays the foundation for their future success. Having previously coordinated Dolly Parton Imagination on the north coast, the thing I heard most from families was how excited their child was every month when they received their book in the mail- a gift every month! The joy and excitement of a child receiving a book of their own in the mail is immeasurable, and these efforts are making a significant difference across communities in Oregon.

We know that a child's earliest experiences set the foundation for all future learning and that 90 percent of brain development happens before age 5. When young children develop language skills and learn to read, they are better equipped to engage in learning and become empowered to learn.

Early literacy skills also set children on a path to greater opportunity in their education and for their future selves. Literacy helps offset oppression and poverty, and when our systems ensure all learners acquire literacy skills, especially our youngest, then they are oriented toward justice.

Even before the pandemic, only **46 percent** of all students in Oregon were reading proficiently by the end of third grade. When kids don't learn to read by third grade, the chances of dropping out of high school increase four fold (Hernandez, 2011). We support the investment in Dolly Parton Imagination

Library and believe it has the potential to change outcomes for students across the state.

We see Imagination Library as one critical piece of a comprehensive birth to five literacy strategy - as supported by the Birth to Five Literacy Fund (HB 3198, 2023) and the Department of Early Learning & Care's [Birth to Five Literacy Plan](#). We urge you to support HB 2811, and keep on going to make sure Oregon's youngest children have the foundational literacy support they need to be reading on grade level by 3rd grade.

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