

Testimony in Support of HB 3011

Early Childhood Education Workforce Development

House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Representative Hudson, Chair; Representatives Fragala and Harbick, Vice-Chairs
February 11, 2025

Oregon State University's School of Human Development and Family Sciences (HDFS) is a nationally recognized leader in the field of early childhood development and learning. For example, the Hallie E. Ford Center's Early Learning Systems Initiative (ELSI) partners with Oregon's Department of Early Learning and Care to increase access to high-quality, professional learning opportunities and provide coaching and technical assistance for the early learning and care workforce in Oregon. Our HDFS degree programs span both the Corvallis and OSU-Cascades campuses and offer comprehensive undergraduate and graduate education, cutting-edge research opportunities, and community engagement initiatives. At the heart of our commitment to early childhood development are our campus child care/ECE programs located at both the Corvallis and Cascades campuses.

Our deep involvement in the early childhood field places us in a unique position to understand the critical needs and challenges facing families and child care providers in Oregon.

Early Childhood Workforce Development Matters

Early childhood educators are pivotal in shaping the future of our society, and the role of early childhood educators has never been more essential. They not only prepare children academically but also nurture empathy, resilience, and a love for learning that influence their trajectories well into adulthood. But the early childhood education (ECE) workforce is in crisis. Historically low compensation in the sector has caused many early care and education programs to close due to challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled staff.

Professionals with ECE degrees (or closely-related degrees like Human Development and Family Sciences) possess the knowledge and skills to foster critical developmental milestones in children during their most formative years—from birth to age eight. Quality early education sets the foundation for lifelong learning, socialization, and emotional well-being. Educators trained in ECE understand how to create supportive, enriching environments that promote cognitive development, language acquisition, and foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Oregon State University's Degree Programs are Models for the Nation

At OSU, our HDFS programs are distinguished by their integration of cutting-edge research conducted by our faculty, who are leaders in early childhood and child development as well as in human development. We prepare our students to become early childhood leaders, capable of contributing to policy development,

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advocacy, and leadership roles. Our HDFS faculty continually update curricula to ensure students are prepared to lead today and in the future. The HDFS degree includes two options to advance the early childhood workforce: *Early Childhood* and *Child Development*. Our comprehensive curriculum blends theoretical knowledge with practical application, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to meet the diverse needs of young children and their families. The program emphasizes evidence-based practices, cultural competency, and inclusive education for all. By fostering critical thinking and a commitment to lifelong learning, our graduates become influential educators and administrators in Oregon and across the nation. Our ability to train and support the next generation of educators and early learning care professionals depends on increased funding for early childhood faculty and staff to deliver the teaching, advising, and other educational supports necessary for their training. Our ability to financially sustain and expand our campus ECE centers depends on increased funding.

Hands-On Learning for Students is Critical to Their Success

Campus ECE programs provide essential hands-on learning experiences for students in early childhood and family development. These programs are not only vital resources that enable our student parents to pursue their academic and professional goals and our employees to excel at work, but they also serve as living laboratories for our HDFS students. Under the guidance of seasoned professionals, students engage directly with children to develop essential skills in classroom management, lesson planning, and individualized instruction. They learn to observe developmental progress, assess needs, and implement teaching strategies that foster growth and learning. This immersive approach not only enhances their educational experience but also builds confidence and competence. In addition, students get applied experiences in the Hallie Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families on projects such as the Early Learning Systems Initiative and other translational research projects. However, in order to provide these experiences, we need additional faculty and staff to support student internship and practicum experiences.

By serving both OSU and the broader communities around our Corvallis and Bend campuses, we directly serve Oregonians, and we provide our students with direct experience with children and families from diverse backgrounds. Students gain a deeper understanding of inclusivity and adaptability—qualities that are indispensable in the field of early childhood education.

Public University and Community College Partnerships are Key

Building a robust ECE workforce depends on strong partnerships between public universities and community colleges. OSU campus ECE centers and HDFS faculty collaborate with community college faculty to build degree pathways from 2-year to 4-year degrees. In Bend, faculty and campus leaders at OSU-Cascades and Central Oregon Community College (COCC) are currently creating a memorandum of understanding to advance collaborations between their campuses, degree programs, and campus ECE programs and lab school experiences. Similar conversations are happening between OSU Corvallis and colleagues at Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC). We are committed to sharing and jointly leveraging resources and facilities and to creating seamless pathways with smooth transfer of credits across institutions for students pursuing degrees focused on early childhood. We also engage deeply together in community-based initiatives. For example, faculty from OSU-Cascades and COCC have served together on

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the Leadership Council of the Early Learning Hub of Central Oregon for over 10 years. Such partnerships are instrumental in addressing the shortage of qualified early childhood educators and in promoting educational attainment in Oregon.

Student Success is Our #1 Priority

Oregon State University is committed to student success. Through our new strategic plan, *Prosperity Widely Shared*, we endeavor each day to become a university where every student graduates. Our campus ECE centers in Corvallis and Bend play a vital role in supporting this priority. By providing accessible, high-quality early care and education, we enable students who are parents to pursue their academic goals with peace of mind, knowing their children are in a nurturing and educational environment. This supportive infrastructure helps to reduce the stress and logistical challenges that student-parents may face, contributing to higher retention and graduation rates. Furthermore, the centers serve as a resource for all students, offering employment opportunities, volunteer experiences, and research initiatives. By fostering a community that values and supports its members, OSU ensures that every student has the opportunity and resources to succeed academically and personally.

Investing in college and university ECE infrastructure supports both sides of the child care system by 1) promoting the workforce pipeline to prepare and support the ECE sector workforce, and 2) increasing access to quality early care and education to university and community families, with an emphasis on college students with young children. We urge you to support HB 3011 and ensure its passage to benefit Oregon's students, workforce, and families.

Respectfully submitted,

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