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On Behalf Of: Neighborhood House Head Start  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee  
On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5514

The Oregon Head Start Association is working to ensure that every eligible family has the opportunity to enroll their child in a local Head Start program. Our top priority is to stabilize funding for these local programs. We are requesting \$387.843 million in funding from existing sources, including the General Fund and the Student Success Act. This funding would enable us to maintain current services and operate without significant budget cuts. Head Start programs, established nearly 60 years ago by President Lyndon B. Johnson, have a long history of success. With increasing uncertainty at the federal level, state support for Head Start has never been more critical.

OPK, a state-funded program that operates under the same guidelines as federal Head Start programs, offers high-quality, free preschool for children ages 3 to 4. These programs support vital language, literacy, and emotional development and are available in every county in Oregon. Head Start provides nutrition support, health care, and works closely with families to help them stay engaged in their child's education. The program ensures that children enter kindergarten well-adjusted and ready to learn. Eligible children, primarily from families earning less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level or facing other challenges such as homelessness, foster care, or participation in TANF, SSI, or SNAP, are given the opportunity to succeed. Early Head Start extends this support to children from birth to 3 years of age. The program has proven that children enrolled in Head Start are more likely to read by 3rd grade, graduate from high school, and pursue higher education. Additionally, Head Start prioritizes children's health, offering physical, dental, and mental health services along with free meals to ensure they are healthy and ready to learn. A key to its success is emphasizing the role of parents as their child's first teacher, offering opportunities for parents to support their child's educational development and further their own education and job training.