

Good morning, Co-Chair Senator Sollman and Co-Chair Representative Ruiz. My name is Robert Kleng, and I am the Director of Eastern Oregon University Head Start. I want to emphasize my support for Senate Bill 5514. My top priority today is to communicate that this bill is necessary to stabilize funding for EOUHS and all Head Start programs in Oregon.

I ask that you support the \$387 million allocation to the Department of Early Learning and Care in the Governor's budget proposal. This funding level represents a current service level adjustment, not an expansion or budget increase. It would clearly communicate that the priorities of the great state of Oregon include caring for our youngest and most vulnerable residents. If approved, it will allow EOUHS to maintain our existing services and operate without facing significant budget cuts. As we navigate through uncertainty at the federal level, state support for Head Start has never been more critical.

The funding model I commonly use to describe EOUHS is a house of cards, the foundational elements being the Oregon Department of Early Learning and the Federal Office of Head Start. If federal funding is reduced or even paused, EOUHS will face an unacceptable level of risk. This could jeopardize the necessary early learning and care services for families in Eastern Oregon and the entire state.

Over the last 50 years, EOUHS has worked diligently to build a strong Head Start program in Baker and Union Counties. A reduction or pause in federal funding threatens to undo years of hard work and commitment to create a successful early care and education program from the ground up. It would be a tremendous loss for our children, families, and community.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I urge you to consider the importance of stable funding for our programs so we can continue to serve our families effectively.

