

Testimonial for Head Start Advocacy – DELC Budget (SB 5514) & Workforce Needs

Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Ruiz, and members of the committee, for the record, my name is **Darcee Kilsdonk** and I am here today on behalf of **Clackamas County Children’s Commission and the Oregon Head Start Association.**

The children in early care and education today experienced the COVID-19 pandemic during their most formative years of brain development. As a result, we are seeing significant increases in behavioral needs, unique feeding challenges, and a greater demand for social-emotional instruction than ever before. At the same time, our workforce has undergone a dramatic post-pandemic shift, with many new and developing professionals entering the field—right when we need to attract the best and the brightest to serve our youngest learners.

In order for Head Start programs across the state to continue offering the high quality, multi-generational services that result in 7:1 return on investment, we ask that you stabilize funding for these essential programs. We are requesting **\$387.843 million** from existing sources, including the General Fund and the Student Success Act. This investment would allow us to maintain services and avoid devastating budget cuts that could impact thousands of our most vulnerable families.

With uncertainty at the federal level, state support for Head Start has never been more critical. Right now, programs across Oregon are working with DELC to prepare lists of potential service cuts if federal funding is reduced or eliminated. We need your leadership to ensure stability for the families and children who rely on these programs.

We face a workforce crisis. Although there are unserved children on waitlists, many Head Start programs are unable to expand due to a shortage of qualified early childhood educators. That’s why we strongly support **HB 3011**, which would establish the Early Childhood Education Workforce Development Fund and provides \$20 million to public

universities, community colleges, and campus-based childcare centers offering job training.

Addressing this workforce shortage is one of the most impactful steps Oregon can take to ensure more children have access to early learning opportunities. We deeply appreciate your past and ongoing support of Head Start. Please prioritize both funding and workforce development to meet the needs of Oregon's youngest learners.

Thank you for your time and consideration.