

Submitter: Troy James Winslow

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Re: SB 5514

Position: In Support

Co-chair Sollman, Co-chair Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

I write to you today as an ardent advocate for **Head Start**, a program that is nothing less than an unrecognized crown jewel of public education in our state. Please allocate **\$387.843 million** from existing funding sources, including the General Fund and the Student Success Act, to safeguard this essential program and prevent devastating budget cuts. Without this investment, we risk unraveling a vital safety net that nurtures early development, fortifies family stability, and propels entire communities forward. To underfund Head Start is to abandon those who rely on it most—our children, our working families, our communities.

As a father, 5th generation Oregonian, and pediatric healthcare worker, I can tell you with certainty that Head Start is an indispensable repository—a wellspring of communal strength, social services, and educational equity, serving as a beacon of opportunity for our youngest learners and their families. Despite its undeniable impact, however, it remains an under-resourced, untapped reservoir of immensely important public health data and social services outreach that could transform even more lives if given the support it deserves.

Local Head Start programs are a foundational public benefit, providing high-quality, free preschool for children ages 3-4. They foster critical language, literacy, and emotional development and are in every county in Oregon. OPK, a state-funded program that follows the same rigorous guidelines as federal Head Start, ensures that thousands of low-income families have access to early childhood education. With uncertainty at the federal level, State support for Head Start has never been more critical. These programs are not just a cost; they are an investment that yields immense returns—children enrolled in Head Start are more likely to read by third grade, graduate from high school, and pursue post-secondary education.

Head Start is more than a program; it is a haven for those in need, a full belly for many, and a new beginning for a some. It is an awe-inspiring trove of hardworking parents, grandparents, neighbors, and friends who, despite economic hardship, remain committed to building a brighter future. It is a living, breathing archive of resilience and potential. I know, because during the darkest of times for my own young family, we found open arms, big smiles, and nothing but love at Clarendon School. I am inspired every day by the incredible people I've met—and continue to meet—especially those who dedicate their lives to teaching these kids and those supporting that mission within PPS's Head Start program.

A key to Head Start's success is its emphasis on the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Parents gain tools to support their child's educational journey and opportunities to advance their own education and job prospects. Head Start prioritizes children's health by offering physical, dental, and mental health support, as well as free daily meals and snacks that promote proper nutrition and ensure children can focus on learning rather than hunger.

Every dollar invested in Head Start is an investment in Oregon's future. The program yields undeniable returns in school readiness, public health outcomes, workforce participation, and community engagement. It is a force multiplier for equity, ensuring that children from marginalized backgrounds are not left behind before they even begin. To cut or limit its funding is to mortgage our future for short-term savings, a trade-off that we simply cannot afford.

Head Start deserves much more than **\$387.843 million** in survival funding—it deserves our full-fledged commitment to expansion and sustainability. Let us not be remembered as the generation that turned its back on its children when times got tough. Let us, instead, be the stewards of an education system that values and cares for every learner, regardless of circumstance.

Respectfully,

Troy Winslow