



Date February 27, 2025

Senator Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair  
Representative Ricky Ruiz, Co-Chair  
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Sollman and Representative Ruiz,

As we prepare for the upcoming 2025-27 biennial budget, the Oregon Head Start Association is working to ensure that every eligible family is provided with an opportunity to enroll their child in a local Head Start program. With uncertainty at the federal level, state support for Head Start has never been so critical.

The Oregon Head Start Association strongly supports funding included in the Governor's recommended budget that maintains current service levels of funding for the Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK) program. Funding allows programs to maintain existing levels of service and provides funding to help local programs keep up with the high cost of inflation. The Oregon Head Start Association is asking for **\$387.843 million** funding from the existing funding sources that support our programs, the General Fund and funding from the Student Success Act. Combined with federal Head Start funds, OPK provides 36 early learning services to an estimated 14,810 children a year.

At this time, our programs are preparing a list for the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) to demonstrate the services Oregon could still provide in Oregon if federal funding were decreased and to highlight potential needs should drastic cuts take place. As the 2025 legislative session progresses, we will share that data with you as you work to develop and plan the biennial budget.

OPK is a state funded program that operates under the same guidelines as federal Head Start Programs. Head Start provides high quality, free pre-school for children ages 3-4. Programs support critical language, literacy, and emotional development, and are located in every county in Oregon. Head Start provides nutrition support, health care support, and prioritizes working with families to help them stay engaged and involved in their child's education. Head Start's OPK programs provide children with a chance to begin public kindergarten well-adjusted and ready to

learn. Eligible children primarily come from families that earn less than 100 percent of federal poverty level, are currently homeless, in foster care or from families receiving TANF, SSI or SNAP benefits.

Early Head Start provides early learning and comprehensive child development along with family support services to low-income families with children from birth to 3 years of age. Programs serve families with full-day and full-year programs tailored to meet the needs of eligible families. Services include both center-based services in an early learning care and educational setting with home visits. The program also provides home-based services with weekly home visits for those parents who prefer that option. Our programs are seeing an increase in demand for center-based services across the state.

Head Start programs, established nearly 60 years ago by President Lyndon B. Johnson, have a long history and track record of success. Head Start puts children on the pathway to success. Children are more likely to read by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, graduate from high school and receive a post-secondary degree. Head Start programs prioritize children's health. Programs promote physical, dental, and mental health. They provide free daily meals and snacks to promote good nutrition and ensure children are healthy and ready to learn. A key to Head Start programs success is that Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Parents learn how best to support their child's educational development and are given opportunities to advance their own education and gain job training.

In addition to funding needed to maintain existing levels of service for Head Start programs, the association supports critical investments to provide funding for Head Start facilities and for statewide investments to support the early childhood workforce.

Across the state, Head Start programs need to add classroom space. Many Head Start programs have been working to secure plans that would allow them to plan, design, build, renovate, or acquire needed classroom space. Head Start programs have shovel ready projects in communities across the state. We will provide a full list of shovel-ready projects for consideration as part of the capitol construction process.

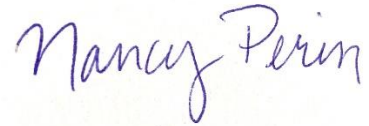
Many programs across the state can't expand and provide services to more children because they don't have the workforce needed for expansion. The Oregon Head Start Association strongly supports HB 3011. Legislation establishes the Early Childhood Education Workforce Development Fund and appropriates \$20 million. Funds would be distributed to it, the distributed to public universities and community colleges that offer early childhood education degrees and certificate programs. Funding would also support campus-based childcare centers that offer job training to students. Addressing the workforce shortage in early childhood is one of the biggest things the state can do to open more preschool classrooms.

We appreciate your past and on-going support for Head Start programs all across Oregon. Head Start programs in Oregon are uniquely positioned to succeed despite fears around the loss of federal funding, and the need for facilities and workforce investments - largely because of the

strong state investment and support. This support helps thousands of Oregon families ensure they and their child are ready for the transition from preschool to kindergarten.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Justen Rainey at (503) 816-3075.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nancy Perin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy Perin  
Executive Director  
Oregon Head Start Association