

Submitter: Whitney Watson
On Behalf Of: Future Generations Collaborative
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5514

March 7th, 2025

Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Ruiz, and members of the Joint Committee on Education.

For the record my name is Whitney Watson. I am Iñupiaq from the Native Village of Kotzebue and Mexican on my maternal side and a descendant of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska on my paternal side. I currently serve as the Policy Mode Lead for the Future Generations Collaborative, a collective impact partnership between Native-serving and Native-specific organizations, institutions, governments, and community members.

I am writing in support of SB 5514, the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) coordinates culturally appropriate and family centered services that recognize and respect the needs of all children, families, and early learning care professionals.

Experiences during early childhood impact a child's future learning, relationships, and behavior, for the remainder of their lives. Literacy is a developmental process of skill building that begins at birth, parents and caregivers are a child's first teacher. Culturally specific programming supports children's healthy cognitive development, executive function, and promotes resilience in AI/AN preschool aged children. Our community requires services that honor and incorporate traditional knowledge and practices in child-rearing and education. Investments in the Birth to Five Early Literacy Fund ensures that every child in the State of Oregon continues to have pathways to success in literacy and life through early learning and care opportunities that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.

Through investing in DELIC, The State of Oregon has the opportunity to strengthen access to early learning and care that will lead to better outcomes in health, education, and relationships creating ripple effects throughout communities.

Respectfully,
Whitney Watson
Policy Mode Lead