

Thursday, March 6, 2025

RE: Department of Early Learning & Care Budget (SB 5514)

Chairs Sollman & Ruiz and Members of the Committee,

Early experiences, good and bad, have a profound and lasting impact on brain development and life outcomes – meaning these early years drive later state revenue and spending. During the first three years, more than 1 million neural connections form every second. The brain grows faster at this stage than at any other time of life. Half of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) occur by age 3. Experiencing 4 or more is correlated with challenges later in life, such as substance abuse and behavioral health challenges. Prevention and early intervention are critical in breaking this cycle ([Burke Foundation](#)).

This is exactly why the decisions the legislature makes about the Department of Early Learning & Care are so consequential. Every program in this budget directly impacts Oregon’s youngest children – who are the Oregonians most likely to experience poverty and eviction. For Oregon to have a brighter future, the 2025 legislature must make progress for our youngest residents. When we choose children, we improve people’s lives and bend the cost curve on state spending driven by crises.

The Early Childhood Coalition has identified a set of investments above current services level in the Department of Early Learning & Care Budget that are grounded in research and community experience and ready to have an immediate impact:

- **Employment Related Day Care** (up to \$500 million). There are now nearly 10,000 families on the waitlist for this program, which helps families afford needed child care so they can work and continue their education. The legislature has made significant investments in increasing the capacity of the child care sector to meet families’ needs. Now we need to ensure families can

afford care, or we run the risk of losing this new capacity. Every \$45 million invested can serve approximately 1,000 families.

- **Birth to 5 Literacy Fund** (\$25 million). Literacy begins at birth, with vocabulary development, access to books, and parent coaching as proven strategies to increase readiness for kindergarten and 3rd grade outcomes. The legislature directed DELC to develop a Birth to 5 Literacy Plan, and now it is time to fund that plan as a part of implementing HB 3198 (2023).
- **Healthy Families Oregon Home Visiting** (HB 420, \$6 million). Home visiting is a proven approach that improves physical & mental health outcomes, strengthens parenting, enhances self-sufficiency, and keeps families together and safe. Home visiting does this by supporting parents as their children's first teacher - starting prenatally and continuing through the critical first years of life. Healthy Families Oregon provides home visiting in every county in Oregon, and this investment would stabilize the workforce and expand culturally and linguistically diverse home visitors, especially in rural Oregon. Despite the impact, only 18% of families with 2 or more risk factors have access.
- **Relief Nurseries** (\$4.9 million). Relief Nurseries provide more intensive home visiting & therapeutic classroom support for 1722 families to strengthen child development and prevent foster care - an immediate cost savings to the child welfare system. \$4.9 million at DELC will serve an additional 300 families.
- **Child Care Workforce** (HB 3008, ~\$28 million). Child Care is the workforce that supports all other workforces. Yet child care businesses are struggling to recruit and retain employees. The [2024 Oregon Talent assessment](#) found the largest labor shortage in the state is in Child Care (12.6%) due to poor wages & benefits and limited career pathways. HB 3008 targets these challenges through the Child Care Recognition Payment Program, first funded in 2022, and two apprenticeship programs that are showing promising early results.

Finally, Current Service Level for all DELC programs is the foundation for these investments. Now is the time to increase opportunity for children - so no future legislature is left addressing the long-term consequences of failing to invest in young children today.

Sincerely,

Adelante Mujeres

Ballmer Institute

Children's Institute

Early Childhood Education-BMCC

FACT Oregon

Families First Child Care Center

Happy Go Lucky Child Care

Heppner Daycare & Preschool

IRCO

Kim Huling -YMCA Child Care Center

Metropolitan Family Service

Neighborhood House

Northwest Regional ESD

Nurse-Family Partnership

Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries

ORAEYC

Oregon Head Start Association

Our Children Oregon

Prevent Child Abuse Oregon

Reach Out & Read

Southern Oregon Early Learning Services

Sweet Peas Daycare & Preschool

Umatilla Morrow Head Start

Yamhill Community Care