

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Senator Sollman, Representative Ruiz and members of the Ways and Means Education Sub-Committee

My name is Kathy Martell, and I am a retired Salem-Keizer Elementary Classroom Teacher, Title 1 Reading Specialist, and a member of The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, an organization of women educators dedicated to supporting excellence in education. I am here today to speak in support of Senate Bill 5514.

In the 2023–2024 school year, 76% of third graders in the Salem-Keizer School District did not meet the reading proficiency level. That is unacceptable. Parents are their children’s primary educators; but may not always have the resources, knowledge, or time required to meet all their needs. A community effort is needed to support them. Children who are exposed to books at home and read to, early in life, often develop a passion for reading, setting them up for success in kindergarten.

As a teacher for 3rd and 4th grade, I had students reading at various levels, and it was my responsibility to help them enhance their reading skills. With a class size of 28-32 students, this task presented significant challenges.

After obtaining a Master of Science in Education and a Reading Endorsement, I worked as a Title 1 Reading Specialist at a high-needs school in Salem Keizer. A grant from Delta Kappa Gamma allowed me to establish an evening reading program for families. This program involved families in an environment with books, and hands-on activities that families took home. It fostered confidence in parents, prompted older children to read to younger siblings, and promoted family engagement through shared learning.

After retiring, I remained dedicated to promoting literacy for all. I was encouraged when Oregon decided to allocate funds for Early Learning and established 16 Early Learning Hubs. These Hubs focus on developing partnerships among Human Services, Health, Early Learning, K-12 Education, and the business sector which creates local systems that are aligned, coordinated, and family-centered. My chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma established a partnership with the Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub in Salem. We work together helping to get books into the hands of young children. We have 10 Little Libraries established in Salem-Keizer with many being at Preschool Promise sites the Hub funding supports. In the summer of 2022, under the Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub affiliate we helped launch The Dolly Pardon Imagination Library. With 50% matching funds granted by the State during the 2023 legislative session, the entirety of the two counties are now covered.

Last year the Hub celebrated a decade of service to the community, significantly impacting parents, families, teachers, and community organizations working toward a common goal; students reading at grade level. It is imperative SB 5514 passes so **we can continue providing fair and equal opportunities for our early learners and ensure they are all ready for kindergarten by age 5 and be at or above the proficient reading level in grade 3.**