

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and members of the Committee. My name is Lisa O'Connor, and I represent the Family Nurturing Center Children's Relief Nursery, serving Jackson and Josephine counties. I know you have difficult decisions ahead, and I urge you to invest in Relief Nurseries statewide—because they create lasting, systemic change for our youngest learners with the biggest challenges.

Relief Nurseries address critical issues like child abuse, homelessness, generational trauma, poverty, mental health, and substance abuse—challenges that deeply affect families and communities. Parenting is hard even in the best circumstances, but for families struggling to meet basic needs, it can feel impossible. We believe in strengthening entire families, not just children, which sets us apart from other early learning programs.

Our therapeutic classrooms and outreach services are often the first step in changing a child's life. Parents describe their experience with us using words like *trust*, *empowerment*, *connection*, *transformation*, and *hope*. When parents lose hope, they sometimes believe their child is better off without them, fueling our foster care crisis. In Jackson County alone, on average 500 children are in foster care at any given time, costing the state \$41,000 per child per year. We are requesting \$4.9 million over the governor's proposed budget to increase critical services statewide and significantly reduce those costs.

Relief Nurseries are a smart investment, saving Oregon approximately \$4 for every \$1 spent by reducing costs across ODHS, OHA, ODE, and DOJ. About 90% of our families have no further Child Welfare involvement. We've seen parents go from homelessness to homeownership, becoming vital contributors to Oregon's economy. One parent put it best: "*I am now the parent my child has always deserved.*"

Thank you for prioritizing families and ensuring a brighter future for Oregon.