

March 24, 2025

TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
FROM: Ali King, Our Children Oregon
SUBJECT: Support for SB 5515

Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ali King and I am the Policy and Advocacy Director for Our Children Oregon (OCO), a statewide organization that champions equitable policies and opportunities for every child by leveraging data and research. The Children's Agenda, convened annually by OCO, brings together more than 135 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the wellbeing of Oregon's children, youth, and families.

As a coalition of child and family advocates, educators, administrators, parents, and policy experts, we have seen firsthand how investments in children and families have immediate and long-term health and economic benefits for individual communities and the state.

The Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) (HB 3201) is one of the top priorities of our 2025 Children's Agenda and has strong and broad support from our partner organizations across Oregon. Federal reimbursement rates have not kept pace with increasing food costs and there has been a big decline in child care providers participating in CACFP. This passes the cost of food to families, who also cannot afford it. Oregon can address this as we have with the school meal program—by providing a supplemental reimbursement rate.

Our Children Oregon also supports increased funding for **Farm to School** initiatives. Farm to School is a partner to our state's School Meals for All program, which ensures access to meals at no cost for all Oregon students. Increased funding for the Farm to School program will help students eat healthier and more locally, will help support farmers, and will build a strong local food system which supports our local economy.

Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) are also programs that Our Children Oregon endorses. Early intervention is a proven, cost-effective strategy that helps children with disabilities develop essential skills during the most formative years of their lives. The early years are crucial for a child's development. Early intervention can make a significant difference in a child's ability to reach their full potential, reducing the need for more intensive services later on. These programs also offer invaluable support to families, providing them with the tools and resources they need to navigate the challenges of raising a child with special needs.

We appreciate the work you do to support Oregon's families and children. As I'm sure you know, investing in early childhood is the first step in crisis prevention. Our public systems must create policies and programs that reduce barriers and ensure children and families are supported and set up to succeed.

We urge you to increase CACFP, Farm to School, and EI/ECSE funding to ensure Oregon's young children and families have what they need to thrive and reach their fullest potential.

Sincerely,

Ali King, *Policy and Advocacy Director, Our Children Oregon*