

Testimony before Ways & Means Committee Roadshow

Thank you Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and members of the Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Crystal Ross, and I am the Program Director for Family Relief Nursery at Volunteers of America Oregon. I have worked for VOA Oregon for over 13 years and have been the director of the Relief Nursery for over 10.

I strongly urge you to support HB 3533 that will increase funding for Relief Nurseries \$4.9 million above the Governor's Recommended Budget.

Volunteers of America operates a Relief Nursery in inner SE Portland serving Multnomah County. This is one of the 38 Relief Nurseries throughout Oregon that provide children, birth through age five, and their families with wraparound child development and parental support services.

Relief Nurseries are *not* childcare. We provide services for over 2,300 children and families in Oregon to keep young children safe, strengthen families, prevent abuse, and reduce costly foster care. Each Relief Nursery program provides four core services:

- Therapeutic Early Childhood Program classrooms,
- Outreach & Respite Childcare,
- Home Visiting, and
- Parenting Education.

The first five years of life are vital for a child's development, and we support children and families during this critical time. Because of our work, 90-95% of children enrolled in our services can remain safely living with their parents. Keeping children with their families and out of the costly foster care system is a huge part of what we do.

Relief Nurseries are also a unique public-private partnership. We provide at least a 25% community match for every dollar invested by the state.

Relief Nurseries need your support for \$4.9 million above the Governor's Recommended Budget to sustain services for over 2,300 children and families and reach up to 300 more children statewide. This will allow Relief Nurseries to continue responding to rapidly changing community needs and children and families in crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, and I urge your support for this vitally important funding.