

Submitter: Amy Paterson Sandie
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5515

Dear Members of the Subcommittee,

I am writing as a parent of children who received Early Intervention Services. I urge your support for an amendment to Senate Bill 5515 that would allocate \$432.8 million to fully fund Oregon's Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs. My children received home visiting services from a specialized teacher and a physical therapist. These teachers helped me work with my twins who were born at 27 weeks gestation, about three months early. They showed me how to best support my children's development—giving me practical strategies that I could implement at home. Because of these highly specialized services, my kids got the support they needed to thrive and "catch up" to other kids. In addition, I got the support I needed to feel confident caring for my children knowing I was doing the best I could to give them a good start despite their delays.

I am also writing to you as an early learning specialist. When I returned to the workforce, I was inspired by the high-quality services my children received at Clackamas ESD and decided to become a licensed EI/ECSE teacher. Giving back to other families the vital services my family received has been incredibly meaningful for me. Currently, I am a teacher at the new Clackamas Early Childhood Center. I have an inclusive classroom providing specialized instruction to children with disabilities including deaf/blindness, deaf, cerebral palsy, autism, down syndrome, and developmental delays. I work with an amazing team of occupational therapists, speech and assistive technology therapists, physical therapists, a team of three incredible education assistants, and the amazing people from Columbia Regional Inclusive Services. I teach these children with children who are "typically developing". Our program is providing students the opportunity to learn and grow together, creating a community that welcomes everyone.

Every dollar invested in early childhood special education saves money later on. It is a research-based investment to ensure young children with developmental delays and disabilities receive the services they need during the most critical years. EI/ECSE services help children develop vital skills in communication, social, and cognitive skills, helping more kids to be ready for kindergarten. I am concerned as a former recipient of these services, and now as a teacher, about the funding gap. This gap has not kept up with growing demand, leading to service delays, reduced program capacity, and an increasing strain on families who depend on these essential supports.

By fully funding EI/ECSE, the Legislature can ensure that every eligible child receives the support my family received and the service I now provide to families in our county. I urge you to support the \$432.8 million allocation to EI/ECSE in SB 5515 to address the gap in funding. Every child deserves to get the educational support they need to thrive. Thank you for taking the time to include my testimony to support our earliest learners.

Sincerely,
Amy Paterson Sandie
West Linn