



Strengthening Families and Keeping Children Safe

March 27, 2025

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97302

Re: Support for HB 3933

Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Nguyen, Vice Chair Scharf and Members of the Committee,

I am Kelly Sutherland, Executive Director of Relief Nursery, Inc., the founding Relief Nursery, with sites in Eugene and Springfield. I am delighted to provide testimony on behalf the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries.

Thank you Representative McIntire for introducing House Bill 3933 and committee members for this opportunity to share more about Relief Nurseries and our unique role in our communities and the state.

Relief Nurseries are child development and family support programs serving children birth to 5 years of age with a focus on social and emotional development. We know the first three years of life are critical to emotional and intellectual development.

Relief Nurseries are very intentionally public private partnerships. We are not fully funded state programs. In fact, our model requires us to match – at a minimum – our state allocated dollars with a 25% community investment. Many Relief Nurseries far surpass that community investment, leveraging state dollars even further.

An ECONorthwest analysis shows Relief Nurseries provide an estimated two to four dollar return on every dollar spent due to improved educational outcomes and reductions in child abuse and neglect.

We know that child abuse and neglect can begin the painful and costly trajectory to foster care, juvenile justice and later criminal justice system involvement. Relief Nurseries interrupt that trajectory.

There are 38 amazing Relief Nursery sites across the state, each unique in its community. All Relief Nurseries provide the core Therapeutic Early Childhood Program classrooms, Outreach & Respite Child Care, and Parenting Education - and basic needs support. Mature Relief Nurseries are those most likely to have more diverse funding streams and additional programs and services like mental health counseling, special education, behavioral health services, and substance use disorder recovery support.

The additional \$4.9 million in funding for Relief Nurseries will support growth and maturity for our organizations, based on expressed community need, allowing some Relief Nurseries to serve more children and others to provide more intensive intervention services.

I see HB 3933 is titled "Relating to funding for Relief Nurseries, declaring an emergency." I am here to tell you, that is not hyperbole.

I'd like to provide a description of a classroom in Eugene that will serve to illustrate what's happening in Relief Nursery classrooms all across the state, the severe challenges our children are experiencing, and the unique ways Relief Nurseries meet children's needs.

Therapeutic indoor and outdoor play is emphasized, as most Relief Nursery children do not have access to safe outdoor play space near their homes, and in today's world, technology and television have often replaced outdoor play and exploration.

This classroom, as an example, serves seven toddlers on Mondays and Wednesdays, and seven toddlers on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Some classes are offered four or five days a week and some are offered two days a week, in order to serve more children. Ideally, however, children are in class more frequently and consistently. This is a resource issue for Relief Nurseries.

Of the 14 toddlers, 2-3 years of age, most have very few words. Seven of 14 children have special education needs with a mental or behavioral health diagnosis. Two of the children are in Child Protective Services/ODHS custody. One child's father is incarcerated and four of the children are being raised by grandparents. One child abuse and neglect report was made to Child Protective Services.

Take a moment and reconsider - seven of the 14 children have special education needs with a mental or behavioral health diagnosis.

How does a child, as young as the age of two, receive a mental health diagnosis?

These children are experiencing emotional dysregulation. They hide and express fear. They have tantrums and inflict self-harm. They show aggression and violence towards teachers and other children. This is trauma revealing itself.

Traumatic experiences in early childhood have profound life-long consequences ranging from psychological disorders, to negative impacts on physical health and even educational and employment issues.

Relief Nursery families experience an overwhelming number of risk factors, contributing to the negative impact on their children, including but not limited to extreme poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, past Child Protective Services history and mental health issues. 90% of Relief Nursery families have five or more risk factors.

Relief Nurseries are making a difference, changing the trajectory for these children and families with comprehensive, wraparound services, interrupting intergenerational violence and trauma.

HB 3933 funding will allow Relief Nurseries to continue to nimbly reach far and wide, responding to rapidly changing community needs and children and families in crisis.

On behalf of the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning, and thank you Representative McIntire, for introducing HB 3933, prioritizing \$4.9 million in additional funding for Relief Nurseries. We are also grateful for the support and testimony provided by Representative Levy and Representative Reschke.

In response to Representative McIntire's question about what will happen if this funding is not awarded to Relief Nurseries, I would like to provide additional clarity.

Classrooms at some Relief Nurseries will remain empty, waiting lists at other Relief Nurseries will remain static or grow, and other Relief Nurseries will not be able to increase dosage or days in the classroom for the older children for whom we know additional time and consistency is extremely beneficial. Some Relief Nurseries will not be able to increase staff in their Outreach or Therapeutic Early Childhood Programs to provide more intensive child development and mental health support services.

Thank you,

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