



March 26, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

Dear Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Ruiz, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kemp Shuey, Executive Director of Community Action, and I am writing to urge your support for SB 5515 which will increase funding for Oregon's Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs. Community Action is a nonprofit dedicated to eliminating conditions of poverty and we have been a leader in early childhood education in Washington County for decades as through our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These vital services provide essential support to children from birth to age five who experience disabilities and developmental delays, laying the foundation for their lifelong success.

Research consistently demonstrates that early intervention significantly enhances developmental outcomes, increases school readiness, and reduces the need for more intensive services later in life. By addressing developmental challenges early, EI/ECSE programs not only improve individual futures but also yield long-term cost savings for our education system.

Despite their proven effectiveness, EI/ECSE programs in Oregon have faced substantial funding challenges. In recent years, a \$20 million statewide cut to the EI/ECSE general fund, coupled with rising enrollment, has strained these programs. At Community Action we have seen how these shortfalls have affected our programs on the ground. One in five children in our Head Start program have an Individual Family Support Plan (IFSP). Our Northwest Regional Education Services District has significantly reduced staff which has directly led to reductions in individualized services to children who need them most. Cuts to EI/ECSE services mean that children with an IFSP are not receiving the support they need at the most critical stage of development. This places additional strain on our classroom staff, as they are left struggling to bridge the gap, leading to increased classroom disruptions and diminished learning experiences for all children.

The lack of funding for EI/ECSE services hinders other education priorities identified by the state:

- Ending Suspension and Expulsion in Preschools and Child Care – Without adequate support to child care providers to meet the special education needs of children, Oregon runs the risk of providers exiting the field. Oregon is already a



child care desert and EI/ECSE services are the kind of infrastructure we need to bring people into the field, not leave it.

- Oregon Reading Benchmarks – Only 22% of third-graders are meeting literacy benchmarks, well below Oregon’s goal. The social and emotional development of children in early education form the bedrock of their education journey. EI/ECSE services are a critical tool to prepare children for school age participation and success.

I urge you to prioritize the full restoration and expansion of EI/ECSE funding in the upcoming budget. Adequate investment in these programs is crucial to meet the growing needs of our youngest learners and to fulfill our commitment to providing equitable educational opportunities for all children.

Thank you for considering this urgent matter. I am confident that with your leadership, we can ensure that Oregon's children receive the early support they need to thrive.

Sincerely,
Kemp Shuey