

To: Senate Education Committee

From: Dana Hepper, Children's Institute & Alliance for Early Intervention

Date: Tuesday, April 16, 2025

Re: Support for EI/ECSE Funding Modernization Committee, HB 2682

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Committee,

My name is Dana Hepper, and I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Institute. Our vision is to make Oregon the best place to be a kid. Children's Institute convenes the Alliance for Early Intervention, a coalition of organizations connected to Early Intervention & Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) who come together to advocate for these critical services with a common voice. **Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2682 .**

Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education is Oregon's birth to 5 special education program. Oregon is required to provide special education services to young children by Federal IDEA law and state law. Nine regional programs (ESDs and School Districts) across the state serve over 14,000 young children with diagnosed disabilities and delays. This represents 2-3% of all infants and toddlers and 6-7% of all preschool age children. Programs may not have a waitlist – all eligible children must be offered services. Services include special education services and accommodations, speech pathology, occupational and physical therapy, and more. Services are provided to children and their families and care providers in their homes, community preschool and child care settings, and specialized classrooms.

Effective EI/ECSE services increase opportunity and outcomes for children in K-12 special education and beyond. While these services are foundational, Oregon has not updated the funding model for this program since 2011. The funding model is based on a number of assumptions about what constitutes

an “Adequate Service Level” for eligible children. But **research and context have changed over the last 14 years, and it is past time for a refresh.**

To get this process started, the Alliance for Early Intervention commissioned a preliminary report (uploaded on OLIS) looking at some of the challenges with the existing EI/ECSE funding model. For example:

- **Current Service Level.** LFO and ODE just revamped the CSL calculation for the State School Fund. EI/ECSE, which is operated by ESDs and School Districts, experiences the same cost drivers as the State School Fund. Yet there has not yet been any revision of the CSL For EI/ECSE.
- **Adequate Service Level. The 2011 adequate service level recommends that children most impacted by their disability receive 12–15 hours of preschool each week. Yet most of Oregon’s publicly funded preschools now provide 30 hours** of services each week. Children with disabilities should not receive less preschool than typically developing children.
- **Caseload considerations.** Every September, about $\frac{1}{3}$ of students exit EI/ECSE to enter Kindergarten. Then the caseloads build back up over the course of the year as new children are referred and found eligible. Yet **our funding model assumes that programs have the average amount of students all year long – leading to overwhelming caseloads at the end of each year when caseloads are the highest but staffing levels are the same.**

Our hope is that the HB 2682 advisory committee, convened by ODE, can build from this report to develop a revised funding model to bring back to the 2027 Legislature.