

Submitter: Jessica Bowersox  
On Behalf Of: SMART Reading  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Thank you, Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez & Members of the Committee.

My name is Jessica Bowersox, and I'm the Executive Director with SMART Reading, a statewide early literacy organization that provides two key ingredients students need to succeed: reading support and access to books.

Since our founding in 1992, we've served over 312,000 young readers in 32 Oregon counties and three tribal nations, and given away over 4.7 million books. I'm here today to thank you for your continued support for SMART Reading through grant-in-aid.

As you know well, we are in the midst of a literacy crisis in our state with only 39% of Oregon third-graders meeting reading benchmarks, and significant education gaps for students from marginalized communities. We are heartened to see the heightened attention on early literacy by the Governor and the legislature, and we know there is still much work to do. While we support new initiatives and efforts, today we simply urge you to continue supporting research-backed, community-based organizations like SMART as the proven simple and effective way to help ensure kids get the support they need. Since 2013 the legislature has provided grant-in-aid funds to SMART so that we can buy books for our readers – for some children these may be the first books they've ever owned.

Ninety percent of SMART Reading students show significant improvement in overall literacy development, including phonics skills, vocabulary, and more. SMART Reading provides a vital service to schools in every corner of our state at no cost to them. I urge you to continue supporting this critical work by continuing SMART's grant-in-aid allocation. Thank you for your time, and your support of literacy!