



April 10, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez,

On behalf of Children's Institute, we strongly support the University of Oregon's request for \$53.25 million in state bonding to construct a Child Behavioral Health Building. Our vision is to make Oregon the best place to be a kid. This requested investment will help Oregon achieve that vision by expanding access to urgently needed preventative and early intervention care and strengthen Oregon's children's behavioral health workforce.

As you well know, Oregon faces a behavioral health crisis. While much attention is on the crises we can see in our communities, the Legislature has an opportunity to address the often invisible crises – by increasing access to interventions that reduce later crises, break unhealthy intergenerational and societal cycles, and bend the cost curve on our behavioral health system. This work requires investing in behavioral health prevention, intervention, and treatment for children and youth and their families.

The Ballmer Institute and Prevention Science Institute are key state leaders in getting ahead of the state's behavioral health challenges. The Child Behavioral Health Building is uniquely positioned to address both behavioral health service delivery and the education and training infrastructure needed to expand the workforce.

This 54,000-square-foot facility on the UO Portland campus will:

- Expand access to free, evidence-based behavioral health services for youth and families.
- Reach rural and underserved communities through a new telehealth center.
- Train a diverse new workforce of behavioral health professionals equipped to serve in schools, clinics, and community settings.
- Support research and innovation to improve outcomes and strengthen care systems across the state.



By combining clinical services, workforce training, and applied research, the facility supports a comprehensive approach to addressing Oregon's youth behavioral health needs.

Bringing the Ballmer Institute and the Prevention Science Institute together under one roof will align workforce preparation with applied research and service delivery, strengthening the pipeline from classroom to care and expanding support for children and families across Oregon.

This investment would also support progress on Oregon's new CCO performance metric to increase access to 0-5 behavioral health services. Currently, only about 3% of Oregon's babies and preschoolers on Medicaid receive a behavioral health intervention through their health insurance. The Oregon health Authority has indicated that these services should reach 11% of 0-5 year olds, based on need. Notably, we have struggled as a state to even get these services to children clearly in need – like children in the child welfare system, children with an incarcerated parent/s, and children whose parents have received substance use disorder treatment services in the past year. We know how to provide young children, alongside their families, with early behavioral health treatment. We just need the focus and the funding to make it happen.

We respectfully urge you to prioritize funding for this high-impact, forward-looking investment in children, families, and the state's behavioral health infrastructure. Oregon's children deserve access to the care they need, and this project will help ensure they receive it.

Sincerely,

Dana Hepper
Director of Policy & Advocacy
Children's Institute