



January 23, 2023

The Honorable Lisa Reynolds
House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
900 Court Street NE, H-485
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Reynolds,

In 2023, Head Start programs face many of the same challenges that non-profits and businesses do. Operating costs have significantly increased, workforce and labor shortages are impacting early learning programs, and many Head Start programs don't have adequate facility space to expand and serve more children. These are all challenges we look forward to working with the committee to address.

A top priority for the Oregon Head Start Association is to secure funding to increase the early childhood facility infrastructure. Simply put, we need more classrooms! The legislature has made significant investments to provide more early learning opportunities for families all across the state. Head Start programs have also been working to expand the hours programs operate to better meet the needs of the families in our programs. These are two key contributors to the need for more classroom space in Head Start programs.

The Oregon Head Start Association has been surveying members and this is a consistent need in every county. Head Start programs strongly support HB 3005 and the development of an Early Childhood Infrastructure Fund and an allocation of \$100 million in funding for grants to eligible preschool providers and programs.

We are working with other early learning providers to develop a list of potential projects that are already in the works but need funding to finish. A key challenge for early learning programs has historically been finding the funding needed to purchase, renovate, or lease additional classroom space. Often times, programs must be really creative to figure out how to add additional space to accommodate children or expand. We believe that HB 3005 would make a significant impact in helping early learning programs add classroom space to better prepare Oregon's youth for kindergarten.

As many of you know, Head Start programs operate Oregon Pre-Kindergarten (OPK). This is a state funded program that operates under the same guidelines as federal Head Start programs. Head Start provides free preschool for children ages 3-4. Programs support critical language,

literacy, and emotional development, and are located in every county in Oregon. Head Start provides nutrition support, health care support, and prioritizes working with families to help them stay engaged and involved in their child's education. Head Start's OPK programs provide children with a chance to begin public kindergarten well-adjusted and ready to learn.

Children eligible for Oregon Pre-Kindergarten come from families that earn less than 100 percent of federal poverty level, are currently homeless, in foster care or from families receiving TANF or SSI benefits. Approximately 12,170 children are enrolled in federal or state Oregon Pre-Kindergarten programs.

Over the years, we have seen tremendous success with Head Start. Children are more likely to read by the 3rd grade, graduate from high school and receive a post-secondary degree. Programs promote physical, dental, and mental health. They provide free daily meals and snacks to promote good nutrition and ensure children are healthy and ready to learn. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's most important teacher. Parents learn how best to support their child's educational development and are given opportunities to advance their own education and gain job training.

We strongly encourage you to support HB 3005. Adding more classroom space will provide hundreds of new families with the ability to attend a Head Start program. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "J Rainey".

Justen Rainey
Oregon Head Start Association Lobbyist