

Date: February 8, 2012

To: The Honorable Vic Gilliam, Co-Chair
The Honorable Carolyn Tomei, Co-Chair
House Human Services Committee

From: Dana Hargunani, MD, MPH

Subject: HB 4165, Related to the Early Learning Council sunset removal

Co-chairs Gilliam and Tomei, and members of the committee, I am Dana Hargunani, Child Health Director for the Oregon Health Authority. However, today I am speaking as a pediatrician, a public health professional, and a mother of three pre-kindergarten children. I am here to testify in support of House Bill 4165.

It is well known that the foundations for lifelong health and economic productivity are established prenatally and throughout early childhood. Early experiences and environmental influences have a profound impact on the trajectory of a child's life. However, our disconnected and uncoordinated methods for delivering services to children are inadequate, especially for the most vulnerable. As a pediatrician, I see this daily. The Early Learning Council offers the opportunity to create a system that is coordinated, effective and accountable.

Transformation of the early learning system and healthcare delivery are both vital for the future of Oregon's children. Let me share an experience that highlights this critical link. As a professor of pediatrics, I recently contacted a Head Start program to see if pediatricians in training could observe Head Start classes. The Head Start program was eager to support our educational needs. But they had an ask, as well.

Nearly a quarter of their Head Start students had not yet completed an annual physical or dental exam, as required by the federal Head Start program. While a handful of these children were uninsured, most of them had an identified primary care physician. For these families, the barriers to getting preventive health care were too great. To complete their requirements, the Head Start program asked us to organize a one-time health fair and provide physical exams for the twenty plus children in need.

A physical exam administered in a school gymnasium by an unfamiliar health care provider is no match for a medical home. A child with unmet healthcare needs will

likely face poor educational and socio-economic outcomes. Overall, a broken web of social, emotional and developmental screening and early childhood services is not a system and does not meet the needs of our children. The Early Learning Council is an opportunity to fix this.

In alignment with Oregon's healthcare transformation, we must create a coordinated system of state and local early child services that produce the outcomes children deserve. It is time for us to improve the investments we make in early childhood. For these reasons, I am asking you to support House Bill 4165 and the work of the Early Learning Council.

I would be happy to provide any additional information for you. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.