



MEASURE: HB 4165
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SUBMITTED BY: Isaac Regenstreif

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To: Members of the House Human Services Committee, Co-chair Tomei and Co-Chair Gilliam

Date: 8 February 2012

My name is Isaac Regenstreif, Chair of the Ready for School Leaders Panel. We are a group of volunteers from around the state -- business leaders, former elected officials, citizen activists, Republicans and Democrats. None are employed by any childhood programs or government agencies affected by this legislation. Our common belief and driving motivation is that there is no more important investment Oregon can make for its future than early childhood. With me today to help answer any questions you might have is our Campaign Manager Elise Brown and David Mandell, who directs policy and research for the Children's Institute

For the past eight years, under the very able leadership of Dick Alexander, we have advocated side by side with Head Start, Stand for Children and many others for increased state investment in quality pre-K and kindergarten programs. We also advocated last session for the systematic changes passed by the legislature in SB909.

We are here before you today for several reasons.

First, we offer thanks to the Oregon legislature for your consistent recognition over the past three biennia that there is no better return on investment, given the States' limited resources, than early childhood. Research has shown us over and over again that investment in the early years gets results. We truly appreciate what you and your colleagues have done to protect those investments through these recent hard economic times and difficult choices.

Second, we know you are once again facing serious budget shortfall issues. We would like to strongly advocate for maintaining the commitment to funding early childhood programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start that the Legislature has demonstrated over these last few biennia.

Finally, to the legislation before you today, HB4165:

Despite the best efforts of many dedicated people, we are still falling short. Too many children in Oregon arrive unprepared for kindergarten. This achievement gap causes them to fall behind in future schooling. It increases the likelihood they will not graduate from high school, will not find adequate employment, will become dependent on safety net services and come in contact with the criminal justice system.

Funding is part of the answer, but it is not the entire answer.

Too much of the money we are already spending is not based on adequate

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data about kindergarten-readiness or outcomes-based research about what really works. We believe the hundreds of millions that are already spent in Oregon can be spent more effectively, with greater accountability to the taxpayers and with greater cooperation between agencies, providers, parents and families.

Change is difficult, but change is necessary. We simply aren't getting the job done now.

The legislature took the first step with passage of SB909 last session. The Governor followed by appointing an outstanding bi-partisan group of citizens to lead efforts at restructuring: the Early Learning Council. They have made a number of recommendations to move the early childhood system forward in this state to improve service delivery and outcomes for Oregon's children. We support these recommendations and think the changes encompassed in HB4165 are the next step in this process.

It is true that we do not yet have all the answers about how the regional hubs envisioned in this legislation will work. We do not believe that is a reason to reject this legislation and put the brakes on the progress that has already been made. Over the next year we will all have an opportunity to work collaboratively on designing the specifics of the new system -- a system we believe has the potential to have a significant and lasting impact on the next generation of Oregonians.

We encourage you to help take the next steps, which we believe include:

- Passing HB4165.
- Encouraging the Early Learning Council to proceed in collaboratively designing a new and better early childhood system in Oregon.
- Maintaining critical funding for Head Start and Early Head Start that was approved last session.
- Focusing the state on development of a new, more valid kindergarten readiness assessment.

We stand ready to help on all of these.

Thank you for your time.



Isaac Regenstreif, Chair, Ready for School Leaders Panel