

Testimony to House Human Services Committee  
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Good Afternoon. I am testifying today as the Chair of the Early Learning Council (ELC). I am also the Director of the Center for Evidence-based Policy at OHSU. I want to commend this Committee and your colleagues not here today, on your dedication to our youngest children and your resolve to improve Oregon's approach to supporting them. My colleagues and I on the ELC are looking forward to working with you. My message today will be short: The time is now. We are ready.

I'd like to start by sharing a quote:

*"Much of our spending goes into supporting at-risk individuals and communities which are presenting a range of challenging demands on our social, health, justice and education spending. In spite of increased spending, Oregon has experienced steady growth in rates of births to teens, low birth weight babies, and percent of (abused and neglected) children."* Legislative Children's Care Team Report, 1992

This sounds like some of the issues this committee is charged with addressing. But this quote is from the 1992 Legislative Children's Care Team, chaired by then Speaker Larry Campbell. We have known about these problems for a long time. In its 1993 session, the Legislature enacted a statute that set up the Commissions on Children and Families and established the "Healthy Start" home visiting program as one response to its findings. The goal was to ensure that families with young children had the resources they needed to help their children succeed – and linked this success to school readiness. Due to concern over resources, Oregon phased-in Healthy Start and focused the program on first births. The first three programs were established in 1994, but it took almost 10 years to bring it statewide, and in the end (even now) provision of services was inconsistent from community-to-community or from family-to-family. The time is now. And we are ready.

Your Early Learning Council is comprised of twenty dedicated volunteers representing a wide range of expertise and experience. Among ELC members we have those who in the present or past work with young children in a variety of settings (from early intervention to Head Start to various child care settings and specialty treatment). We have directors of community non-profit organizations serving children and families. We have educators and school board members. We have experience with policy and implementation at a state and local level. We have parents, researchers and academics, and more. We stand ready, enthusiastic and able to implement your statewide policy. And the time is now.

*"The first years of life are a crucial period in a child's life, and during this period child is sensitive to the protective mechanisms of parental and family support; Brain development that takes place during the first year of life is rapid and extensive and has implications for lifelong physical, social-emotional and cognitive well-being; and An integrated statewide system of community-based supports is essential to the health and well-being of young children and their families."* SB 965. Section 2 passed by the 2001

Oregon Legislature

This quote is from SB 965 passed by the 2001 Oregon Legislature (also known as the Oregon Children's Plan), almost ten years after the Legislative Children's Care Team and initiated partly in response to an inconsistent statewide strategy, and the lack of positive outcomes for young children. The time is now. And we are ready.

In response to the statutes put in place in the 2011 and 2012 Legislative sessions, communities all across Oregon have begun to prepare for an outcome-driven focus on our youngest children – one that serves as the bridge between education and healthcare. Some of those communities are here today to tell you about their preparations. I want to mention the importance of the connection between healthcare and early learning – addressed in the bill -- and highlight one way that we have begun. Recognizing the critical connection, the Oregon Health Policy Board and the Early Learning Council have tasked a joint subcommittee with recommending real and substantive connections. To date, this joint subcommittee has focused on shared outcomes, early identification and synchronizing the delivery and financing of care coordination. We are ready!

I understand there is active discussion about whether to pilot test, phase or fully implement Oregon's early learning system. With my "evidence-based policy" hat on, I would like to make one final comment. The evidence on social change essentially distinguishes between incremental change (where established structures, processes and knowledge are extended and augmented) and fundamental change (which replaces the status quo with new expectations and a new order). The literature associates success when there is alignment between the nature of the change that is sought and the pace of change.

To date, Oregon's efforts have been incremental and slow (over twenty years). If this body determines that it is time for fundamental change in which we replace the current system with new expectations, outcomes and approaches, we are ready.