



WASHINGTON COUNTY
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Together for Children

**Washington County
Commission on Children and Families**

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND HOUSING

Testimony on HB 2013 – March 11, 2013

William Thomas, Washington County Department of Health and Human Services

Chair Tomei and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is William Thomas. I am testifying on behalf of the Washington County Department of Health and Human Services and our Commission on Children and Families.

Washington County is preparing to submit an early learning application if hubs are rolled out statewide by January 1, 2014. If demonstration projects are funded, Washington and Columbia Counties may apply to be a site. The Department of Health and Human Services has been authorized by our Board of County Commissioners to submit an application as an early learning services “hub” either in partnership with Columbia County, if Columbia so desires, or only for Washington County. In that context, I would like to offer two points and an illustration.

First, we support the concept contained in 2013 of funding demonstration projects for early learning services during the 2013-15 biennium. By focusing resources through demonstration projects we think Oregon can learn much about what strategies are successful in “moving the needle” for kindergarten readiness and what the costs and scalability of these strategies will be for the 2015-17 biennium. Projected 2013-15 resources are not sufficient to make a significant difference on statewide kindergarten readiness but could make a real difference in what we learn.

Second, we believe that a foundation of services needs to be funded in all areas of the state, whether hubs are rolled out statewide without - or even with - demonstration projects, or whether demonstration projects are funded in lieu of implementing hubs statewide. If hubs are implemented statewide there has to be a responsible transition plan for ensuring there is not a gap in funding for critical community-based services to children and families that are currently funded with flexible funds through the Commission system. Moreover, a grant program for hub applicants is needed to ensure these communities have the capacity to engage parents, mobilize community partners and start-up strong hubs. On the other hand, if demonstration projects are funded without a statewide implementation of hubs, some funding for services— even if it is at a reduced level – needs to be allocated for all non-demonstration project areas of the state.

Washington County alone is home to about 20,000 0-6 year old at-risk children, which is 18.5% or nearly 1/5 of the statewide total at risk of not being ready for kindergarten, not reading in first grade and not reading at grade level by 3rd grade. Last Monday you heard testimony from the Early Learning Council that there are 108,000 at-risk 0-6 children in Oregon. According to PSU estimates, 46,000 0-6 year old children lived in Washington County as of July 2011. Of these 46,000 children, 44.5% or 20,500 are minorities, including 14,300 Hispanic children, and 43.3% or 19,930 are low income (based on free and reduced lunch eligibility rates).

In 2011-12, fewer than 4,000 of Washington County's 0-6 children were served in the major programs in the Early Learning System (Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, Head Start/Oregon Pre-K and Healthy Start), leaving more than 16,000 at-risk children without services through these funding streams.

In 2011-12 Washington County's allocations for three Commission flexible funding streams – and therefore the potential allocation to the hub for Washington County - totaled \$330,884. These funds, representing only \$20+ per child, is inadequate to provide needed services and supports that could ensure kindergarten readiness for the more than 16,000 at-risk 0-6 children who unserved by major early learning programs. Last week you also heard testimony from the Early Learning Council that the only funds that will be passing through the ELC hubs will be three flexible funding streams from the former Commission system: Children, Youth and Families, Family Preservation and Support and Great Start.

We think something can be gained for Washington and Columbia Counties' 0-6 children if hubs were to be implemented statewide without demonstration projects, but that the gains will be minimal. Because two of these flexible funding streams - Children, Youth and Families at \$84,994 in Washington County and Family Preservation and Support at \$151,410 – have been funding services for children 7-18 as well as for children 0-6, by narrowing the focus of these funds the early learning hub will provide some additional services to 0-6 children than in prior years. Better aligning and organizing services through Washington County's early learning hub may result in some efficiencies and gains in services as well.

We believe that far more children could be served and far more can be learned in Oregon if demonstration projects were funded. And we know that much more would be gained for Washington County's at-risk 0-6 children and their families if, for example, Washington and Columbia Counties submitted a joint application for and were selected to implement such a demonstration project. It will take a significant investment of new resources – as might be possible through being selected as a demonstration project – to make a real difference in the lives of the more than 16,000 at-risk 0-6 children in Washington County who will not be served in 2013-15 through the Early Learning System's major programs.

We hope these considerations are useful in your deliberations. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony.