



Testimony to Ways and Means Joint Subcommittee On Education, 2-15-17

Co-Chair Monroe, Co-Chair Smith Warner, and the members of the Subcommittee

My name is Heidi Cao, and I am a resident of SW Portland. I am testifying on behalf of the Oregon Center for Christian Voices (OCCV). We believe that funding both high quality preschool for low-income children and Early Intervention & Early Childhood Special Education should be priorities in Oregon.

The Oregon Center for Christian Voices advocates for people whose voices are not heard. This includes children, especially children from low income families or children with special needs. A strong argument can be made for funding early childhood education. Neuroscience research indicates that early childhood is the optimal time to invest into the lives of our children, and that this investment can yield many long term benefits, including improvements in educational outcomes, employment, and health. Therefore the costs of these programs can be justified by the huge benefits for the students who participate, and the long term benefits for us as a society.

However, I think an even stronger argument for funding early childhood education is that how we care for our children says who we are as a society. As a mother of three children, my heart breaks for the children whose opportunities are limited for them even before they are born. The sad fact of life in the US today is that the financial security of a child's family is a huge indicator in whether or not they are receiving the ideal exposure to language and other education opportunities that kids need to thrive. For the 20% of Oregon children living in poverty, early childhood experiences are limited as parents juggle multiple jobs and are left with few childcare options. Scripture says:

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" 1 John 3: 17

If we are not willing to use our worldly goods to help the most innocent and vulnerable members of our society, then we have lost our moral compass.