

April 13, 2017

Representative John Lively, Chair
Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Good afternoon Chair Lively and members of the committee,

My name is Allison Empey and I am from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and am currently a pediatrician at Oregon Health and Science University.

As a resident I participated in Reach Out and Read. I saw how excited the kids were when we walked in and handed them a book. I loved listening to the parents talk about how they had incorporated reading as a family at bedtime and I knew the literature. Reading aloud works. I loved being apart of ROR at OHSU but I wanted to bring this back to my tribe, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. I wanted my tribal youth to have better vocabulary, be more kindergarten ready, and score higher on their third grade reading tests, because we know this predicts high school drop out rates. And so I approached our tribal healthcare clinic and tribal council. Together we were able to bring Reach Out and Read to the tribal children. I am proud to say the program has been at the tribe for over three years now.

As primary care physicians we have the unique opportunity to see children during their first 1,000 days. These first 1,000 days are critical for brain development. By one year of age the brain's processing speed already significantly differs based on parent-child interaction. By two years of age, a word gap between higher and lower income families is already evident. By the age of three, low-income children have heard 30 million fewer words than children in higher income homes. Reading aloud is the single best activity to increase language exposure and this should be started in infancy. Even in communities with home visits, fewer than 5- 10% of families are regularly visited. During the first year of life alone, a family will visit their child's health care provider 5-6 times for well-baby visits and 95% of children see a primary care provider in the first two years of life.

I've seen the potential impact of Reach Out and Read in my community. I'd love to see more children in our state benefit and get off to the right start!

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Allison Empey