

Friday, April 14, 2017

Representative John Lively
Representative Jodi Hack
Representative Carla Piluso
Representative Janelle Bynum
Representative Cedric Hayden
Representative John Huffman
Representative Alissa Keny-Guyer
Representative Sheri Malstrom
Representative David Brock Smith

RE: HB 3069, submitted via email to hecfs.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Chair Lively and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood & Family Supports,

My name is Molly Day and I am the Early Learning Director for United Way of the Columbia-Willamette.

I am writing today to support HB 3069, creating the Early Learning Equity Fund because it is the right time to take this step. Oregon's early learning systems were created for the Oregon of the past when the vast majority of Oregon's young children were White. HB 3069 gives us a way to adapt to the new opportunities in front of us as Oregon's population changes rapidly. More than 35% of babies born in 2014 are children of color, and in several Oregon counties, a majority of children under 5 are children of color.

As the Early Learning Director I support HB 3069 because it gives us a powerful tool to create the system-level change we need in order for every child in Oregon to arrive at kindergarten ready for school success.

In Multnomah County 45% of children age six and younger are children of color. But these children are over-represented in poverty: 67% of children experiencing poverty in Multnomah County are children of color. When race, ethnicity and language are strong predictors of poverty like this then we call that structural racism. This is not the racism of individual perspectives and actions that can be addressed by equity trainings, but the deep, often invisible and even well-intentioned racism that is embedded in our institutions, including our early learning funding patterns. We have an opportunity in HB 3069 to address that structural racism.

HB 3069 is the perfect partner to the Legislature's investments in early learning systems and services for Oregonians. Having worked in early learning for the past 25 years, I know how critical it is that the state sustains and expands foundational investments in core components like Head Start, Preschool Promise and the work of the early learning hubs. We do a lot of good with those funding sources. But sometimes the restrictions of our funding streams get in the way of effectively supporting the young Oregonians who fill our programs.

At United Way we work closely with the culturally specific organizations in our county. They are the quiet heroes of the early learning systems: giving voice to families who are engaged in systems that were not designed for them, building social capital in communities who experience poverty, preparing children for success in schools where their language is not understood, and persisting in the face of both subtle and overt racism. Increasing our state investment in these organizations through HB 3069 will improve the way early learning systems support the children of today's Oregon.

HB 3069 adds a funding source for culturally specific organizations with a track record of reaching, retaining and supporting children of color and their families. Please pass it through to Ways and Means. Join us as its champions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Day". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Molly Day
Early Learning Director
United Way of the Columbia-Willamette