

To: House Education Committee  
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Children's Institute  
Date: Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Re: Support for House Bill 2025

Nearly 30,000 low-income children in Oregon lack access to high quality preschool.<sup>i</sup> The Governor has proposed making a significant investment to serve more children this biennium, and a strong and growing coalition of 25 organizations support that proposal. To successfully serve more children we must continue to refine and improve our approach to preschool. HB 2025 does just that.

HB 2025 allows Preschool Promise contracts to be entered into directly between the state and preschool providers. This bill will allow preschools to have consistent contracting practices and expectations across the state and ensure that preschools that already receive funding from the state can also deliver preschool efficiently. Programs will still also have to partner with other preschools in the region and the Hub to ensure they are responding to community need.

HB 2025 also clarifies that a role of Hubs is to work with partners to assess community needs and collaborate in the creation of plans to address those needs. This is a critical role for Early Learning Hubs, and one that cannot effectively be filled by another entity.

HB 2025 puts all preschool programs on a level playing field by ensuring we finally make needed progress on Head Start teacher salaries. Oregon has an urgent need and an opportunity to make headway on this critical national issue. New America summarized this issue in 2017, saying,

...Head Start teachers became better educated and more effective over the last decade, but unfortunately, didn't receive better compensation in return. Despite the higher qualifications, Head Start teachers in many states make less today than they did in 2007 before the BA requirement went into effect. While Head Start teachers with BA's do tend to earn more than those without BA's, even with a degree the average Head Start teacher earns only \$31,489 per year. In comparison, a public school pre-K teacher earns \$44,521 and a K-12 teacher earns \$56,383 on average. That's almost double the salary for essentially the same job.<sup>ii</sup>

As of 2016, Head Start teachers in Oregon earned below the national average, less than \$30,000 per year on average.<sup>iii</sup> When adjusted for inflation, Oregon Head Start teachers actually earned less in 2016 than they did in 2007, and also earned less than half of what Oregon kindergarten teachers make despite most holding a Bachelor's Degree.<sup>iv</sup>

These salaries are bad for teachers, and they're bad for children. Low wages lead to excessive teacher turnover and teacher stress, which disrupts relationships and learning for young children. In 2017, more than 16% of Head Start teachers left the

profession *during* the school year, and states with the greatest disparity between Head Start salaries and K-12 salaries face some of the highest turnover of Head Start teachers.<sup>v</sup>

In 2015, the legislature developed Preschool Promise from the ground up, and addressing low teacher salaries was built into the legislation. Children’s Institute and Oregon Head Start Association were partners in crafting the salary provision in that statute and supporting the passage of the legislation. Setting salary minimums and targets has had the desired effect – Preschool Promise teacher salaries have moved closer to Kindergarten teacher salaries. It’s time to make this commitment across Oregon’s preschool programs.

Finally, the legislation grows a critical scholarship program focused on expanding access to higher education for early childhood educators. Creating pathways that work for early childhood educators to earn college credit is essential for growing the workforce we need. Early childhood professionals are largely women and are more likely to be people of color and English Language Learners than the general population. Professional Development Consortia have demonstrated their success in southern and central Oregon pilot programs in making higher education accessible to early childhood educators who are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Expanding preschool across the state will require a sustained and focused effort to grow the workforce across the state, and this legislation sets the groundwork to do that.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent issues.

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<sup>i</sup> ODE report to the legislature on Key Performance Measure # 1: Percentage of eligible children receiving Oregon Head Start/Pre-Kindergarten services.

<sup>ii</sup> Better Compensation: A Necessary Component for a Strong Head Start Workforce (2017). Available here: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/head-start-workforce/>.

<sup>iii</sup> State(s) of Head Start (2016). Available here: [http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS\\_Full\\_Reduced.pdf](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS_Full_Reduced.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> The Best Teachers for our Littlest Learners? Lessons from Head Start’s Last Decade (2017). Available here: [https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether\\_HeadStartWorkforce.pdf](https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_HeadStartWorkforce.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Better Compensation (2017).