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Dear Chair Doherty, Vice-Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair Helt and members of the House Committee on Education,

As you know, Oregon's demographics are rapidly changing and diversifying. Over 35% of all babies born in Oregon are children of color, and in 5 counties, the majority of children ages 0-5 are children of color. However, the state's early learning system doesn't yet have a mechanism to intentionally invest in programs that are designed by communities of color, with the specific strengths, needs, cultures and experiences of those communities at the foundation of their work. HB 2897 creates that mechanism by establishing the Early Childhood Equity Fund. The fund will make grants available to culturally specific organizations with demonstrated results for young children and families of color.

Latino Network is a culturally specific organization founded in 1996. We are dedicated to providing transformative services to Latino youth, families and communities in the areas of education, leadership and family stability. To prepare Latino children for success in kindergarten, we have developed our own culturally specific early learning and parent engagement programs that are helping our children learn to communicate, build relationships, and develop critical early literacy and early math skills, while supporting parents to be teachers and advocates for their children.

Early childhood programs delivered by culturally specific organizations provide family and community self-determination by offering families the choice to participate in a program that reflects and honors their culture, traditions, and home language. Young children of color and their families face unique barriers to accessing early learning programs that meet their needs and build upon their strengths. Barriers include everything from the easily visible things like language, to more subtle barriers like implicit bias, with young brown and black boys experiencing higher rates of suspension and expulsion as early as preschool.

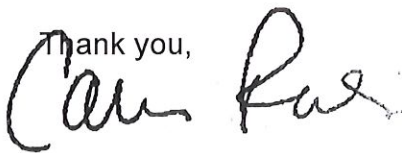
Early childhood programs delivered by culturally specific organizations not only address these barriers, but by grounding our program design, staffing, and

curriculum in the culture, language and experiences of the communities we serve, we offer a safe and culturally sustaining space for young children to learn where home language is preserved and home culture is regarded as an asset for teaching and learning.

Juntos Aprendemos is Latino Network's dual generation early learning program that brings Latino children ages 3-5 and their parents or caregivers into their neighborhood school once a week for 30 weeks. Grounded in our rich cultural traditions, languages and values, the curriculum has been intentionally developed to address the early learning opportunity gap facing Latino children by preparing them for success in kindergarten and by equipping their parents to be their first teachers and strongest advocates. At the end of the 30-week program, we consistently find through our program evaluations that 90% of children make measurable gains in kindergarten readiness skills and 90% of parents report significant changes in family literacy activities and parent engagement.

The opportunity gap has persisted for too long. We are proposing a step toward transforming education in Oregon to make it more inclusive and equitable. This transformation is urgent given the growing population of children of color across the state. Families of color deserve the option to participate in an early learning program provided by a culturally specific organization that might make the difference for their child's future success. We know these programs work for kids of color and their parents. This fund will be used to expand access to communities across the state. Every child in Oregon deserves the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for all you do for children across Oregon. I urge you to support HB 2897 to establish the Early Childhood Equity Fund.

Thank you,


Carmen Rubio
Executive Director