



## Oregon AFSCME Supports the Early Learning Investments in HB 5015

Dear Co-chairs Frederick and McLain and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Education Sub-Committee

Thank you, for the opportunity to provide support for the Early Learning Division's portion of the Education budget, HB 5015. Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents employees of three of our state's Head Starts as well as certified and registered family child care providers, also known as licensed in-home child care.

All child care where they care for infants through preschool aged kids is preschool and some preschool is child care if they are full day programs to meet the needs of working families. Child care can also be before school or after school care where homework support is provided and a meal to start or end a child's day is provided. In all cases it is a consistent nurturing place that supports children in their social and emotional development and sets them up for success in school and beyond. All of the settings represent a system that for too long as been segmented and not working for the families, children or providers and employees. Others will fill in how the ELD's programs in the budget are part of a recipe for supporting children and families and I am here to share how they support the workforce.

Investments in OPK and Head Start are critical for increasing the salary for Head Start employees and for some child care programs. The goal for the Head Start Association this session is to invest in lead teacher pay. This is critical for stabilizing the workforce and keeping teachers in the programs once they have received the education and training required of them. Often times they leave for teaching jobs in K-12 or even outside of teaching. The pay cannot support the debt that has been incurred from getting a degree. However, high turn-over is not limited to lead teachers. There is just as critical of a need to increase wages for other positions as well. One of our members, Sheryl, a cook with a Head Start program for nearly 20 years shared with me the intensity of the work she does. To meet the standards of the federal food program's nutrition requirements, lead cooks need to adjust recipes for the classroom sizes, they need to be able to budget for the entire year buying in smart ways to be able to use money on fresh local foods instead of frozen and canned foods and start the next school year with non-perishable supplies. Every year, several times a year, they lose people to fast food and other service industry work that pays better than Head Start wages.

Increased investments in Preschool Promise are important for improving the wages of our early learning workforce across the system. When the pilot program was originally passed several years ago, many of us worked to ensure that the program was a true "mixed delivery" system – one that a family searching for preschool or child care could find a program that meets their needs. In doing this we included not only centers and Head Start Programs, but licensed in-home child care as well. Doing this was recognition that in-home child care is part of our early learning system and as the lowest paid providers



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in the profession, they too should be included in finding ways to be paid living wages. Providers in the program have been able to blend funds to provide better supports and increase wages. For example some are using Employment Related Day Care for non-preschool hours and Preschool Promise funding for the “school hours.” It is a step toward ensuring that providers are paid for their dedication, expertise and training whether as a formal education or through the Oregon Registry – community based trainings.

If you fund Preschool Promise without funding the OPK and Head Start budgets, you further inequities of pay for the early learning workforce, particularly in programs that have classrooms receiving funding from both sources. The classrooms with Preschool Promise have a requirement with funding support to work toward raising teacher wages to be comparable with their region’s kindergarten teachers. This means that the state is funding some preschool teachers at a well-deserved, and earned higher wage while paying others for the same work at a lower wage. We need to make progress in raising the wages of our entire early learning workforce.

Another key component in supporting the work in OPK, Head Start, Preschool Promise and other child care programs generally is the need for increased funding for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education. As a state, we are striving to ensure that all children have access to care and learning opportunities. To be able to provide inclusive care, providers and programs need funding to support that work - whether it is for additional staffing for one on one supports or connecting the kids in their care to other programs and family supports. The existing programs are overburden and the wait for these services are too long.

Baby Promise is critical for building our supply of infant and toddler care availability. You may have heard that our entire state is a child care desert for infant and toddler care. Infant and toddler care is costly mainly because the staffing needs are so great with a ratio of 1 care giver for 4 children under the age of two. This pilot program sets up consistent funding for infant and toddler slots in specific programs ensuring stability for the provider and children and families.

The professional development supports are also important in ensuring that our providers are getting access to affordable community based training that supports our goals as a state to ensure that children are entering into school ready to learn. The focused child care networks have received positive feedback from providers around the state. They created supportive spaces for collaborative learning and opportunities beyond the classes that have been repeatedly offered. The networks also were training opportunities for providers in their native languages, for English language learners - building our supply of quality culturally supportive care and early learning for all our young ones in the state. Incentives are necessary to ensure that providers are paid for their continued improvements. We cannot continue to expect our lowest paid professionals to bear the burden of continued professional development without the financial support. Additionally, building a substitute pool for the child care and early learning



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providers is critical for ensuring that they get the time they need to attend the trainings that we are expecting them to do. This substitute pool is also necessary for giving the workforce access to time off for other needs, such as taking time off when they or a loved one is sick, or simply taking a day off, something we all appreciate being able to do from time to time.

Finally, I want to mention a few other items in the budget that may not immediately seem like workforce supports. First the ask for increased licensing staff. Licensing specialists ensure that our children are in safe settings and child care providers depend on their licensing specialists to be able to answer questions and provide technical assistance. Like other regulatory programs in the state, child care needs an adequately staffed workforce to ensure that providers have support in getting questions answered and children are in safe care. Additionally, the items for supporting families are critical in giving families the tools for success as their children are developing. When families are engaged, and understand their little ones' developmental needs, they better understand if a provider or teacher raises an issue or concern and all can work together to support that child and if needed get connected to additional services.

Collectively, we have made a lot of progress to raise up and align our child care and early learning programs and professionals. More work is needed to ensure that we are honoring their work with wages that reflect the professional standards they achieve and foundations for success in school and beyond that they build for our little ones.

Please support the Early Learning Division's budget and POPs.

Respectfully submitted by Eva Rippeteau, political coordinator Oregon AFSCME Council 75.