

To: Ways & Means Education Subcommittee
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Children's Institute
Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2019
Re: Early Childhood Coalition Legislative Recommendations

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and members of the Ways and Means Education Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Dana Hepper, the Director of Policy Advocacy at Children's Institute. Children's Institute's mission is to ensure every child in Oregon is prepared for school and life.

This session provides a historic opportunity to make progress for young children in Oregon. The legislature, the Governor, and advocates are in historic alignment with proposals to make significant investments in children and families in the first five years of life. This is the time when the most rapid brain development occurs, which sets the foundation for future learning.

The impact of the proposed investments depend on (1) protecting the existing investments at Current Service Level and (2) raising new revenue with a significant portion dedicated to early care and education. My testimony outlines why 34 organizations so far have signed on to a shared investment agenda and what we see as the investments urgently needed in 2019-21.

The first five years of life set the foundation for the future

The Early Childhood Coalition has been meeting monthly for more than one year, driven by our shared knowledge of the critical nature of the first five years of a child's life. This long-held community understanding has been confirmed by research over the past three decades. In this window, when a child's brain grows to 90 percent of its adult size, that child's experiences (both positive and negative) shape the young brain. During this important period, children are learning how to communicate, form relationships, and begin developing early skills in reading and writing. Without proper care and support many children risk falling behind.

We also know that all parents want the best for our children. We want our children to be nurtured, their curiosity fostered, and for them to be safe. Yet young children experience barriers to these opportunities due to race, poverty, disability, geographic location. Early childhood services are designed to eliminate these barriers and ensure all children are nurtured to reach their full potential.

The Coalition also recognizes we have a long way to go to achieve our vision. Here are some stark realities in Oregon:

- 47 percent of 0–5-year-olds in Oregon are in low-income households,
- Of children in child welfare system, 42 percent of them are 0–5 years old,
- Our entire state is an infant-toddler child care desert.

These realities confirm we have not made the necessary investments in young children and their families. When kids who experience barriers to opportunity get the high-quality care, support, and early education all children need, they are four times more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to experience lifelong health, and have fewer interactions with the criminal justice system.

We also have not made the investments in the early childhood professionals who care for young children. For half children under age 6, all available parents are in the workforce. This creates an

imperative to train, educate, and compensate the adults who spend a significant amount of time with children and have tremendous influence on their well-being and development. These providers are enriching children's brains, nurturing their optimal development, and keeping them safe and protected.

The Early Childhood Coalition has come together to present solutions to the significant challenges facing children and families in Oregon. We propose a comprehensive approach to addressing a complicated problem. We have programs across Oregon that work. But they are not funded to meet the need.

Early Childhood Coalition Legislative Recommendations

We have a comprehensive agenda that is informed by expertise and experience of providers, community organizations, and research. Our recommendations are closely aligned with the recommendations of the Joint Student Success Committee, Raise Up Oregon, and the Governor's budget. These investments work together

These priorities focus on three areas: Child Care, Early Learning & Preschool, and Partnerships with Families.

Child Care

Child care is unaffordable for most parents. This challenge is most acute for families with young children. Child care is most expensive for infants and toddlers, and the entire state of Oregon qualifies as an infant-toddler child care desert.

The Early Childhood Coalition is supporting the Governor's proposal to invest \$10 million in infant-toddler child care through Baby Promise, to be run out of the Early Learning Division, to serve 250 infants and toddlers in safe, nurturing child care.

The child care situation is so dire, we also propose a legislative taskforce focused on developing recommendations for the 2021 legislative session to create a plan to improve the child care system so that parents can afford it, children receive safe & nurturing care, and child care providers are supported.

Early Learning & Preschool

The Coalition supports inter-related investments that work together to increase access for all children with approaches that meet individual child and family needs.

First, we support the creation of an Early Childhood Equity Fund. We are supporting a \$20 million initial investment to serve 3500 children and families. We see this as a critical piece of an early learning system that capitalizes on the wealth of community knowledge and effective culturally specific programs operating in Oregon without access to state funding. This investment will also bring needed expertise on working with diverse families into the early learning system as a whole.

Second, children with disabilities also experience lack of access to adequate support to maximize their potential. Only 1 in 50 children with multiple delays receives the level of service recommended by research. The Coalition supports fully funding EI/ECSE with \$75 million to ensure the 15,000 children enrolled in EI/ECSE receive recommended service levels.

Third, children face unequal access to preschool based on their income, and nearly 30,000 children eligible for state subsidized preschool do not have access. We support the Governor's proposal to expand preschool to 6,600 additional children with a \$169 million investment.

Fourth, Oregon serves only 9 percent of eligible families are enrolled in Early Head Start, and we are not consistently providing families in Head Start with transportation, a full school day program, or an adequately paid, stable workforce. We support a investment of \$101.3 million in Early Head Start and Head Start to address these issues.

Finally, we support a needed investment in the early childhood workforce. In order to successfully expand access to early care and education, Oregon must create accessible pathways for the existing workforce to obtain increased education and pay. Professional Development Consortia do exactly that. We an investment of \$7 million.

Partnerships with Families

The Coalition supports the state's goal of increasing the number of stable and attached families. In the education budget, we support a \$5.6 million investment in Relief Nurseries to support opening two new nurseries and seven satellite sites to expand the reach of proven child abuse prevention programs. We also support a \$9.8 million investment to expand Healthy Families Oregon, our statewide voluntary home visiting program that supports family economic stability, child development, and parenting skills in every county in Oregon.

Finally, parenting education is a lighter-touch approach on a continuum of services that support families. We support a \$2 million initial investment in this critical approach.

Now is the time to make progress for young children

We see these recommendations as representative of what Coalition partners hear from parents and early childhood educators across Oregon, aligned with research and best practice, and actionable in the 2019 session. We are eager to seize this moment of incredible need and incredible vision. There is no time to waste. Thank you.

Oregon Early Childhood Coalition Legislative Agenda

3/1/19

THE NEED

Oregon is experiencing an early childhood crisis. Not enough young children are getting the early care and education they need for success in school and life. We need to invest early in children's health, safety, and development. Prenatal to 5 years old is the most significant period of brain development and sets the foundation for all future learning and life experiences.

Today, 47 percent of all children birth to 5 years old in Oregon live in low-income households, and most don't have access to programs and services proven to improve educational and economic outcomes. During the 2019 legislative session, policy makers must prioritize young children and their families in budget and policy decisions. When we invest in young children and their families, whole communities thrive.

There is no time to waste.

OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD CRISIS

- 47 percent of children birth to 5 live in low-income households.
- 42 percent of children in the child welfare system are 5 years old or younger.
- Oregon is the third most expensive state in the nation for child care.
- Early Head Start only reaches 10 percent of eligible children.
- Only 29 percent of children in Early Intervention receive the recommended levels of service.
- Only 1 in 50 children with high needs (delays in most or all areas of development) receive the recommended levels of Early Intervention service.
- 30,000 eligible children lack access to publicly funded preschool.
- Only 47 percent of third graders are reading on grade level. That number is even lower for low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners.
- Voluntary home visiting reaches less than 20 percent of eligible families.

OUR VISION

The Oregon Early Childhood Coalition knows that every child needs positive, nurturing relationships with their parents and caregivers and access to high-quality health care, early care, and education. Young children who experience barriers to opportunity due to poverty, race/ethnicity, disability, language, or geographic location don't often have access to the proven programs and services that support healthy development when their growing brains need to be nurtured most. When they do, these children are more likely to live healthier lives with better educational and economic outcomes. To meaningfully address Oregon's early childhood crisis, we must prioritize the 129,000 young children currently living in low-income households. If we make a significant, sustained investment in young children and their families, Oregon can become the best place to be pregnant, the best place to have a baby, and the best place to be a kid.



CHILD CARE

\$62.8 M

Create Baby Promise to provide more safe, quality child care slots for the children of working parents.	\$10 million
Reduce parent co-pays for child care to make the program accessible to more working families.	\$13 million
Increase funding for child care subsidies to serve an additional 1,000 families. (This restores a 2017 funding cut.)	\$20 million
Increase the number of child care licensing specialists . Oregon currently employs less than one-third the recommended number of licensors.	\$1.5 million
Increase support for child care providers to better recruit, train, and retain providers and enable them to serve more children.	\$18.3 million
Create a child care task force to assess the child care landscape, establish a vision for child care in Oregon, and bring recommendations to the 2021 legislature.	\$TBD

EARLY LEARNING

\$376.5 M

Establish an Early Childhood Equity Fund to support culturally specific early learning, early childhood, and parent support programs across the state.	\$20 million
Increase service levels of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education to support kindergarten readiness for children with disabilities and delays.	\$75 million
Increase funding to Oregon Pre-kindergarten and Early Head Start to serve more children, increase hours of service, provide transportation, and increase teacher pay.	\$101.3 million
Expand access to Preschool Promise to 6,600 low-income children who are eligible for the program but currently can't attend due to under-funding.	\$169.7 million
Strengthen early childhood degree programs and provide scholarships and mentoring to early childhood educators through the Professional Development Consortia .	\$7 million
Create regional centers of excellence to promote best practices in teaching and transitions and alignment between preschool and K-12.	\$3.5 million

PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

\$21.65 M

Open two new Relief Nurseries and seven satellite sites, as well as enable Relief Nurseries to make use of existing infrastructure to serve families on waiting lists.	\$5.6 million
Expand Healthy Families Oregon , our largest statewide voluntary home visiting program for prenatal to age 3, in order to serve more families.	\$9.8 million
Invest in parenting education programs to help parents develop, practice, and improve positive parenting skills to strengthen parent-child bonds and nurture healthy development.	\$2 million
Invest in Family Connects (universally available home visiting) to provide new parents the option of nurse visit in the first weeks after returning home with a newborn.	\$4 million
Expand Reach Out & Read , a primary care service that promotes evidence-based, culturally responsive literacy and parent-child attachment.	\$250,000