

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Summer Learning and Child Care Funding of \$250 million from the state General Fund.

Camp Fire Columbia Before and After School (BAS) programs offer inclusive, responsive programming to children in the Portland Metro area for children ages 5-12 years old. We are supported and Licensed by the State of Oregon Early Learning Division Office of Child Care. Our state licensing allows us to operate as Certified Child Care Centers which requires all of our programs to remain compliant at all times. Compliance standards such as 35 square feet per child, 1:15 staff-to-student ratios, and strict health and safety guidelines monitored by the state of Oregon, county sanitation and State Fire Marshal have always been a minimum requirement to operate. We meet these standards and strive to offer the safest, highest quality programming possible for our families, children and community partners.

Prior to March 13, 2020, Camp Fire's BAS programs worked with 900 children across 15 school locations in two school districts. As a learning organization, we build culturally responsive, inclusive, anti-racist learning environments with site staff and families. Throughout the last year we continued to support staff through their work agreements, built virtual programming opportunities for children and leaned into professional development opportunities to inform the future of supporting the return of programming using a trauma-informed, social-emotional learning approach. Since August 2020, we slowly integrated into three Emergency Child Care locations to help students with their Comprehensive Distance Learning and socialization back into school environments. As of March 1, 2020, we have been able to open five more after school programs. While programs are opening and we are committed to this work, enrollment numbers are extremely low. We are at about 10% of one year ago while continuing to support staff at increased compensation and benefits. Staff compensation and benefits are the cornerstone to equitable human resources practices and must be invested in for us to lead with our values.

This is indeed an exciting investment to ensure that kids are not missing out on opportunities to have both academic and enrichment activities that not only provide growth in learning but also much needed social connections that too many children have been missing out on. Children are amazing at their ability to endure change and take on challenging situations. However, stay-at-home orders, illness of family members, and online school are impacting social, emotional and mental wellness in ways no one has seen. Our staff are forming developmental relationships from day one with kids to re-build supportive, compassionate routines that will help kids re-integrate back into social environments, deal with conflict, enhance self-esteem, and feel safe. These investments will give schools the opportunity to expand current partnerships with programs such as Camp Fire.

School Child Care Grants would immediately help address inequities and barriers associated with fee-for-service child care programs. Even with state subsidies present, many families do not have the resources to navigate another system or they don't meet every requirement allowing them to use such funds. Camp Fire is working to rebuild our Collective Care Financial Assistance model and grant dollars specifically for child care will help us prioritize further low-income, working families. This would be another tool to help us, and agencies like ours, return to financial viability while also supporting families find theirs.

I appreciate the time and attention given to this important opportunity. Furthermore, I am pleased to be able to participate in this conversation and more to come. It is of great importance that we prioritize financial supports for child care programs and families who will benefit from them for years to come.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Myers
Camp Fire Columbia
Before and After School
Department Director