



OREGON

March 29, 2021

Joint Committee On Ways & Means Subcommittee On Education

Dear Chair Frederick, Chair McLain, Senator Dembrow, Senator Thomsen, Representative Alonso Leon, Representative Levy, Representative Reschke and Representative Ruiz:

We are writing today as proud Oregonian law enforcement leaders, and as members of the non-profit anti-crime organization [Fight Crime: Invest in Kids](#). Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is a national organization of more than 5,000 law enforcement leaders -- 160 of whom live here in Oregon -- who protect public safety by promoting solutions that steer children and youth away from crime and get them started on the right path in life.

**We write to express our avid support for increased funding levels of early childhood programs.** Most of the additional public early learning investments would go towards expanding quality pre-K options in the state--Oregon Pre-Kindergarten and Preschool Promise--to create an additional 6,000 slots. The latest data from 2019 showed 30,000 children from low-income families in the state still did not have access to pre-K. Only with these investments can we eventually close the gap that festers.

While there are some significant increases in Pre-K, Oregon's major home visiting program, Healthy Families Oregon (HFO), lags behind in funding leaving over 600 families without services in 2019. These families qualified for and requested services, yet services were not available. Maltreatment and neglect alone costs Oregon an estimated \$202.7 million a year. Programs like HFO can reduce child abuse and neglect by as much as 50 percent. For law enforcement that is a major win. We would urge a larger increase of investment of \$10 million over the biennium to go towards this program.

These programs are crucial to the success of Oregon's disadvantaged children. Assessments of Head Start and Oregon Pre-K have found participants consistently reach and surpass established benchmarks typically expected of children of this age. And the social-emotional and academic advances in kids can be seen well beyond their youngest years. Attending quality pre-K can even reduce the likelihood that participants will later be taken into our custodies, charged with a crime or arrested and ultimately serving time in jail or prison.

Quality early childhood programs for younger children, ages zero to three, can be transformative as well. **Healthy Families Oregon and Early Head Start have empowered thousands of struggling parents while helping to prevent child abuse and neglect. And the Equity Fund and Tribal Early Learning Hub help close demographic disparities and promote child equity.**

In particular, we know that the following items will be vital in our efforts to build a more equitable education and criminal justice system:

- Expanding access to **child care and high quality preschool**
- **Preventing suspension and expulsion** in early learning
- Supporting and growing a **diverse educator workforce**

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- **Fully-implementing the Student Investment Account**, providing targeted resources for early literacy, expanded learning opportunities, culturally-responsive practices and social, emotional and behavioral health supports

As police chiefs, sheriffs, and district attorneys, we know that quality early childhood programs provide unique, critical building blocks in a foundation that can help children in our communities succeed. We urge you to fully support the Early Childhood Coalition's increased funding requests in early childhood programs. Thank you for your continuous support for our state's children.

Sincerely,

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