

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Education Subcommittee, my name is Sabi Velasco and I am the Director of Amazing Minds Child Development Center & Preschool Inc. I am here today to offer my support for fully funding Early Learning Hubs in the 2021-2023 budget.

I have the privilege to work with Early Learning Washington County as a member of their Steering Committee and a preschool promise provider in the county.

As a member of the Steering Committee, I have seen firsthand how they integrate parents, providers, and community based organizations in the decision making structures and work of the early learning hub. I have personally worked with Begoña at Early Learning Washington County to engage over 20 child care providers in our community to learn more about the role of the hub and how they can engage.

I have also experienced firsthand how hubs work with local organizations delivering programming to ensure that when there is a gap in services, it is identified and filled. In partnership with our local libraries, Early Learning Washington County developed STEM Kits and STEM boxes in various languages to have available for families. I know from the families I work with in my program, parents appreciated having these activities in their own home language so they can do activities at home with their children.

In another example of filling a needed gap, Early Learning Washington County partnered with Washington County Child Care Resource & Referral to offer an annual training event to childcare providers across the county. What was particularly unique about this training event was all of the trainings offered in multiple languages including Spanish, Somali, English, and more. While we do have some trainings year round in other languages, this big training event has a huge impact on providers who speak languages other than English.

Lastly, I appreciate that the early learning hub is an advocate for all of early childhood and early learning. Whenever there is an advocacy opportunity at a local or state level, Early Learning Washington County coordinated with parents, providers, and community organizations to bring the voices of our local community to key decision-makers. Without the early learning hub many of us would miss these important opportunities to share why investments in early learning and early childhood development are so important.

I believe in the work of Early Learning Hubs and have seen the impact it has had for me as a direct service provider and the families that I serve. The current budget contains a \$1.4 million cut which was levied on hubs during a COVID-related special session in an effort to balance the budget. While we are just beginning to understand the impact of the pandemic on families with young children, we do know that we have struggled to meet the needs of families facing economic insecurity prior to the pandemic and we know those struggling prior to 2020 have taken the brunt of the impact of the last year. This is not the time to cut services to these vulnerable families.

**I ask you to fully fund Early Learning Hubs at their current service level of \$22.4 million.** Families need coordinated services now more than ever before. BIPOC families have been

disproportionately impacted by the virus, women have disproportionate borne the burden of childcare throughout the shutdown, and we have a real risk of undoing the progress we've made. A cut to hubs means a cut to direct service providers.

Hubs are also one piece of a larger early childhood system that cannot function without stable investment across the board. We support current service level for all early childhood programming, including hubs, and the Early Childhood Coalition agenda investment package.

I urge your support for full hub funding. Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns.

Sincerely,

Sabi Valesco  
Amazing Minds Child Development Center and Preschool, Inc.