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Dear Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education,

On behalf of myself and the Reach Out and Read Oregon team as well as NWP Physicians and Surgeons, I am writing in support of this funding bill. As the volunteer medical director of Reach Out and Read Oregon and a practicing general pediatrician, I would like to share the significant impact that Reach Out and Read Oregon has made in the lives of the children and families that I serve.

After participating in the initiation of the Reach Out and Read program at Kaiser Permanente, my passion has only grown. Each day I have the privilege of visiting with families of young children in my clinic. For many families, coming to the doctor is a stressful experience. There are examinations to be done, vaccinations to be given, hard topics to be discussed, concerns to be explored all in the span of a 20-minute visit. However, adding a book to the visit as a small gift of encouragement to families often helps to melt away the stress—among the endless other benefits of course. When I walk into the room and hand an anxious toddler an age-appropriate, new book, the stress often eases for all in the room.

Making well visits less stressful is just one small benefit Reach Out and Read. The most important benefits are well demonstrated in numerous studies. Patients who receive the Reach Out and Read intervention have a statistically significant increase in receptive and expressive language scores on validated tools. We also know that these children are more likely to be prepared for kindergarten and hence, more likely to succeed in school. It follows that with school success comes benefits to the health and education of the population.

Another benefit highlighted during the stress of the last year is the impact that reading aloud has on the relationship between child and caregiver. Many of the families I see are incredibly stressed with the demands of balancing work and caring for young children. Reading aloud together is a positive childhood experience that can counteract the impacts of the toxic stress that these families encounter.

In my practice, the impact of Reach Out and Read is seen daily and I have endless anecdotes. Many parents were never read to themselves as children and don't realize what a powerful impact this can have on their baby's development. One family that I see came to the 9-month visit very excited to get another book. It turns out the book given at the 6-month visit was read so much that it was almost in pieces! I realized that they didn't have bookshelves full of board books like my kids did—they only had the ones that we gave them at their visits. This 9-month-old, like many infants, stayed home with parents who alternated shifts at work to care for her. She didn't go to daycare or early head start. The only place that her family had to get this information from was the doctor's office. I think it is important to call attention to this fact- 91% of children under 5 see their doctor at least once per year. We also see children starting at birth when exposure to language and positive parent-child interaction make the deepest impacts on a child's brain development. It is our job as clinicians and as advocates for children to raise awareness of the incredible benefits of reading together starting at birth.

By investing in the growth and sustainability of Reach Out and Read Oregon, you are investing in the lifelong health and wellbeing of not only the children I provide care for but also of children across the state. Thank you for this opportunity to share the impact of Reach Out and Read Oregon on my patients, their caregivers, and families, and I urge you to support the program through funding under the Department of Education budget.

Kind Regards,

Katherine A. Clayton, MD