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Oregon Elected Officials  
State Capitol Building  
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To whom it may concern,

I write this letter as a concerned Oregon constituent, parent, and Head Start mom. I have had the unique and fortunate experience these last two years to work at a Head Start center, but not for the Head Start program. I am employed by Gethsemane Lutheran Church as the Youth Pastor. When Gethsemane Lutheran decided to end our Preschool Ministry, Head Start filled the void and the space in our building. We have loved having life and energy injected back into the preschool classrooms, and Head Start has been a friend and ally as much as they have been a tenant.

As the Children, Youth and Family ministries coordinator I was approached with a request for a 'giving tree' last Christmas for one Head Start family by my congregation. It was not long before I realized we would have too much for one family – we were able to serve five families that year, and watching this congregation come alive to serve early childhood learning for a service that is not Gethsemane's own preschool was beautiful.

As much as early childhood education teaches our youth about socializing, feeling, and being human, it is also bringing our communities together. Intergenerational events and community centers are fewer and farther apart, and even church communities seem to be split by age or generation in many cases. Many Head Start classrooms are found within church buildings and although churches are not allowed to send things with Head Start children, Head Start parents are able to pick up church materials if they want to. Head Start families are seeing billboards, they are seeing Easter egg hunts, free dinners, rummage sales, and food pantries that they may not have otherwise ever noticed.

My youngest son, Micah, has enjoyed participating in Head Start in whatever capacity has been afforded us these last two years! We have been extremely privileged in his short five years, and he has never needed conventional daycare, so when he was accepted into Head Start's program last year when he was only three that was the first large scale socializing with children his age he'd ever done. Watching Micah blossom last year was inspiring! The three-year-old who was completely opposite from his brother, and wanted nothing to do with letters or numbers (and everything to do with art and coloring), came home every day from school *excited* about school! He has never felt weird about "Micah milk" (soy milk – lactose intolerance), unlike his older brother who is ostracized at school for being a "weird eater", and Micah is confident in his actions even when he makes mistakes or when accidents happen. These are the attributes and the qualities of character we need in our future leaders. These are the

attributes and the qualities of character Head Start instills in our children without naming them or requiring the kids to repeat their names, but instead by nurturing a caring, loving and quality environment where children can be children and these children can be themselves while respecting each other, themselves, and the staff.

Without receiving enough funding programs like these cannot continue. Ideally, these programs would grow substantially each year until we served every child not just those who fell under a 200% income guideline. I urge you to consider the benefits programs like Pre-Kindergarten and Early Head Start provide for children, families and communities all over Oregon. Benefits like networking resources for food, medical, dental, mental health, utility and rental assistance. Familial benefits like providing space and time for parents while children are at school, providing families preschool that has historically been out of reach for low-income and median income families, keeping money that would be spent on daycare or preschool available to be spent on groceries, prescriptions, tires, or other emergency expenses as they arise.

Please vote to expand monies for early childhood learning in Oregon. Accept the Governor's budget which has included more money in the 2021-2022 budget than last, and our schools deserve full funding!

Thank you,

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