



March 31, 2021

House Committee on Early Childhood  
Chair Karin Power  
900 Court Street  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Power and Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Head Start Association strongly supports House Bill 3201 and the -1 amendments.

As we work with the Early Learning Division to implement and enroll new students with the passage of the Student Success Act, we will need to work to ensure local early learning providers have access to facilities and classroom space to enroll eligible children. Ensuring that our programs have adequate classroom space is a concern that Head Start programs have across the state. Addressing this is critical to ensuring more kids are able to participate in the Oregon Pre-Kindergarten Program.

The Oregon Pre-Kindergarten (OPK) is a state funded program that operates under the same guidelines as federal Head Start Programs. Head Start provides free preschool for children ages 3-4. Programs support critical language, literacy, and emotional development, and are located in every county in Oregon.

Today, Head Start programs serve roughly 60 percent of the children eligible for Head Start. Approximately 12,170 children are enrolled in federal or state OPK. Economic uncertainty created by COVID-19 will lead to more families and children in need of the services our program provides. One of the biggest existing needs for our programs is access to classroom space. We expect this to grow as the state continues to invest in early childhood and early learning.

HB 3201 is a first step toward finding new solutions. Legislation allows the Early Learning Division (ELD) to conduct a study that provides an assessment of early learning facilities across the state. It asks the ELD to evaluate the number of existing facilities, and whether those facilities and classrooms provide enough capacity to successfully implement new enrolled children as the state works to implement the Student Success Act. The study would also look 10 years out with a goal of making sure we get an idea of the future facilities needs early learning providers will have. The study would examine how we currently fund classroom space and provide recommendations on funding sources.

Making sure our programs have adequate classroom space to enroll more children is critical to the success of our program. We believe that HB 3201 is important to help us address current lack of classroom space. This study will provide us with a framework that can be used to develop a statewide early learning strategy that ensures we have enough classroom space to accommodate new children who are ready and eager to learn and enroll in Head Start Programs and other early learning programs.

Thank you for your time, and for your work to improve Oregon's early learning system.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna Schnitker".

Donna Schnitker  
Oregon Head Start Association President