

To: House Education Committee

From: Marina Merrill, Director of Research and Strategy, Children's Institute

Date: February 23, 2021

Re: Preventing suspension and expulsion.

Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Marina Merrill, I am the Director of Research and Strategy at the Children's Institute. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on the need for a strategy to prevent suspension and expulsion in early childhood programs. The Children's Institute along with the Early Childhood Coalition supports HB 2166-1. Young children, including infants and toddlers are being suspended, expelled, or pushed out from childcare programs and from our state funded preschool programs at alarming rates. Black children, Native children, and children who experience disabilities are asked to leave early childhood programs at disproportionately higher rates than other children, which limits their access to enriching experiences and may carry a long-lasting stigma throughout their education.

HB 2166 recognizes the critical role that early care and education providers play in preventing this stigma and supporting children and their families to retain their childcare programming. I would like to highlight a few core features of the bill that are grounded in the research on preventing suspension and expulsion:

- 1) First, I want to call out that there are complex and varied reasons why expulsion happens. We are pleased to see that HB 2166 takes into consideration the root causes of suspension and expulsion and the needs of both providers and children. For example, the bill marshals robust coaching and support for early care and educators to have the tools to better support all children in their classrooms. Children's Institute has heard consistently from early childhood educators throughout the state that they need more coaching and training to work with children with challenging behaviors, supporting children in managing their big feelings, and the inclusion of children in their classrooms experiencing disabilities. This bill addresses that call for support. Additionally, the bill calls for
 - Clearer definitions of suspension and expulsion

- Collecting data on suspension and expulsion to support better accountability and target resources for improvement in the early care and education system; and
- Build out systems of supports for early childhood educators, including anti-bias training and Infant-Toddler Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH); currently the state has a cross-sector Steering Committee dedicated to this important strategy. The steering committee is in the process of learning about how other states have built out their voluntary early childhood mental health consultation programs. We have two planned webinars underway with panelists from other states to build shared learning across our state for this research-based strategy. We hope that some of you will join those opportunities to learn more, the invitation and information is forthcoming;

In addition to these critical coaching features of HB 2166, the Early Childhood Coalition would also like to see the complimentary SB 236 pass so that Oregon can make further progress on the prevention and elimination of exclusionary practices in early care and education settings.

Fortunately, Oregon is committed to closing the disparity in access to high quality education as evidenced by Governor Brown's recommended budget and the recent passage of the Student Success Act. Ultimately, to maintain equity in access to early care and education, we need a statewide strategy on suspension and expulsion that builds capacity of the early care and education system and ensures that children who experience barriers to opportunity due to racism, classism, ableism and other forms of discriminatory policy and practice are not denied or lose access to these proven programs and services designed to strengthen optimal child development. Before the age of 5, a child's brain makes one million new neural connections every second, with early experiences shaping brain architecture. This critical stage of development, makes accessible, equitable, and supportive early childhood programming an essential strategy in which to eliminate racially based disparities in full access to these programs. I hope that you will consider the passage of HB 2166 to ensure that investments in our early

childhood programs yield and all children may reap the benefits. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. Thank you very much for the time.

Data notes, just in case questions arise:

- Oregon has collected data from providers and parents on the prevalence of suspension & expulsion. 25% of providers indicated that they had asked a family to temporarily or permanently remove their child from care due to behavior+.
- 6% of Oregon parents surveyed indicated that they had experienced their child being removed from care. This number was 30% among children with IFSPs (special education services), and also much higher among Native American and Latinx families. (Sample size for Black/African American parents was too small to draw meaningful conclusions, it sounded like, but also above 6%).
- In the 2019 PDG survey of parents, they asked parents “if there was one thing you could change about your child care, what would it be?” and they found the most prevalent answer among parents of color was that they wanted a child care provider who shared their race/ethnicity/language/culture. So, the question becomes, how do our quality systems reflect this important aspect of quality for families? (Not well, yet...)