

Chair and Members of the committee, my name is Rusty White and I am a resident of Gold Beach in Curry County. I am here today to speak about the dire situation families in our communities are facing due to lack of childcare. According to the Center for American Progress, parents of young children in Oregon lead the nation in work disruptions due to lack of, or inadequate, childcare. In fact, Oregon reports nearly double the national average for childcare related job disruption. This disruption can be particularly challenging in rural areas with depressed economies where a vast majority of jobs have hourly wages and few benefits. The State of Oregon Early Learning Division states that the current supply of quality childcare in Curry County is only 17% of 0-5-year-old children. This puts Curry County well below 33%, the federal definition of a "childcare desert." In fact, since the Oregon Early Learning Division report was released in January 2019, ten providers have closed in Coos County, and six have closed in Curry County, which means these outdated statistics are underrepresenting the severity of current childcare options. This was a loss of 23.8% of the licensed providers between the two counties, leaving many parents in our communities struggling to find answers to their childcare needs. Lack of childcare options affects more than just the families of small children; schools and educators, employers, and local economies are suffering as well. The last 12 months have put many issues facing our communities in stark relief and access to high-quality childcare is just one of those issues that needs drastic action. While there are many programs and entities doing good work in this area, I would like to tell you about a local program that will help assure access to childcare to residents in central Curry County.

The Southwest Oregon Children's Foundation has been working with local stakeholders including Central Curry School District 1, our local and regional Head Start Program, Oregon State University Extension Service Family and Community Health, South Coast Regional Early Learning Hub, and local industry partners to develop a pilot program that looks to solve a variety of issues facing Curry County's communities, including:

- The immediate need for high quality local childcare options
- Developing a skilled local workforce to help expand our childcare capacity in the future
- Expanding Career Technical Education offerings to local students
- Helping local businesses and institutions recruit and retain a quality workforce.

This program will expand opportunities for childcare for Central Curry County by providing high-quality preschool and daycare inside schools in CCSD1. Similar programs have been funded and are successfully operating in the communities of Bandon and Coquille. The one aspect of our program that differs is the inclusion of a high school Career Technical Education program in Early Childhood Education. This will help address the problem of a lack of qualified providers that plagues small rural communities. In addition, it will add options for jobs for students who may not have the means or desire to go to college, and are seeking employment locally. According to small pilot programs run by OSU Extension 4H Youth Development with funding from the South Coast Regional Early Learning Hub, there is an interest in early childhood education, with nearly 50% of participants in their babysitter training program indicating that they could see themselves pursuing a career in Early Childhood Education.

While this program will not solve the problem of lack of childcare immediately, it is our belief that funding this program and programs like it will help increase capacity in the short term, while also

increasing necessary workforce to expand opportunities in the future. The success of this program could provide the model that would allow other small, isolated, rural communities to implement their own version to suit their unique community needs. I will close with this; the National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs has found that high quality early childhood programs can yield a \$4 – \$9 dollar return per \$1 invested. This investment in our communities' children could save our communities 1.4-3.1 million dollars. In my opinion, that is money well spent. Thank you for your time and consideration.