

## House Bill 3561 Testimony

Good afternoon, Chair Lively and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Dawn Hendricks, Department Chair of Early Childhood Education and K-12 Education at Clackamas Community College. It is an honor to be here today and have the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 3561, providing financial scholarships to students to pursue their degree in Early Childhood Education.

Early Childhood Education is a critical field that shapes the foundation of a child's learning and future success in school and life. Numerous studies have documented improved outcomes for young children when their teachers are educated and have industry approved degrees. Yet, there is often a shortage of qualified early childhood educators, which impacts our larger society's ability to work if there is not quality, affordable care accessible to families, as we saw during the pandemic.

By offering scholarships for ECE students and eliminating financial barriers, institutions and organizations encourage individuals to pursue careers in the field, ensuring there is a well-trained workforce dedicated to early childhood development. At our college, students who receive scholarships have higher rates of persistence and graduation because the financial burden has been eased or minimized. For high school students who are undecided what to study or where to go, scholarships are often an influencing factor in determining to attend our college's ECE program.

Many of the students in our program at Clackamas already work in the field as teacher assistants and center aids. While they desire to earn a degree to move into a teaching position, the near minimum wages they earn currently does not provide enough funding to pay for tuition and fees. Thus, scholarships are critical to not only recruit new students into the ECE workforce but also to retain the ones we already have.

Scholarships can be targeted to under-represented groups, promoting diversity and inclusion within the field of early learning. At our college, we have 270 Spanish-speaking, Latinx first-generation college students in our ECE program. About 90% of those students receive some level of financial scholarship to make their studies possible. However, we have a long waiting list of potential students who want to start the program yet are unable to because our scholarship resources have been exhausted. Thus, scholarships help ensure that we are creating a diverse teaching pipeline of educators that reflect the diversity of the children and families they serve.

In summary, scholarships for Early Childhood Education students play a crucial role in making education accessible, encouraging individuals to enter and stay in the field, addressing workforce shortages, promoting diversity and ultimately contributing to the quality of early childhood education. It is my hope that the legislature decides to allocate \$2.5 million in the 2024 short session to commence this scholarship program.

Thank you.