

RE: HB2872

Hearing : March 1, 2023

I am writing in strong support of HB2872, the Oregon Imagination Library project.

This bill directs the Early Learning and Care department to administer a program that sends an age-appropriate book monthly to children ages birth to 5. The department will work with a national book gifting foundation (Dolly Parton Imagination library, established in 1995) and with local NGOs to provide the books.

As a retired educator with 39 years of experience in public school education, I can directly verify that children that are read to at home during their pre-school years come to kindergarten much more ready to learn and thrive. I served as Superintendent of the Ashland School District for the last 13 years of my career, and I can attest that this project can help lessen the gap between children from more privileged backgrounds and those that have more challenges as they enter kindergarten.

The goal is to improve 3rd-grade reading proficiency and high school graduation rates. Research repeatedly demonstrates that early reading programs provide measurable benefits for children, and prepare them for future success in school. Statistics show that less than half of Oregon's third grade students meet proficiency benchmarks in reading; and at kindergarten entry, 37% of Oregon's children are unable to recognize a single letter or sound. Early reading exposes a child to rhythm and rhyme, body awareness, colors, letters, numbers, values, diversity, and general language, to name a few attributes. In comparison to those who haven't been exposed to early reading, pre-K testing shows a 38% increase in school readiness for children who have been exposed to early reading programs. They have an 82% better chance of mastering basic skills by age 11, compared to 45% for children who are not school ready. It continues from there, if there are no high-quality early childhood experiences then there is a 25% likelihood of dropouts, 40% more likely to be teen parents, and 60% less likely to attend college.

HB2872 will increase the capacity of local affiliates to enroll more children in their area. The cost per child per year is \$26.00 and with thousands of children to enroll in each county this is a huge fiscal challenge for many local NGOs to sustain annually. This bill would provide much needed stability as well as opportunity for growth.

Our current young families will benefit from passage of this bill and it will benefit future generations of children. I ask that you support this bill and help it move forward with bipartisan support.

Thank you,

Juli Di Chiro, Retired Superintendent Ashland School District

