

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.

I am a retired primary teacher who has taught in kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms. All subjects in those grades are valuable, but the most important life skill is the love of reading.

Learning to read is hard for many children. It is a lot of work!!! The English language is composed of many sounds from other languages. A five-year-old once asked me why the 'ph' as in phone sound is not spelled with a 'f'. I told her I was not sure, but I was currently taking a phonics class and would ask my instructor. My instructor told me it was because of the Greek words we use in the English language. This is just one example of things that don't make sense in the English language. There is the old saying 'i' before e except after 'c', but then what about the words: seize, their, weird, feisty? The English language has many instances where it just doesn't make sense!!

Since the English language doesn't make sense, how can we help children to want to work hard to learn to read? Yes, as teachers and parents we can teach them the tools they need to decipher words, but it's still a lot of work for the child!!!! After 26 years of classroom teaching the answer to that question in my heart is to develop in children a true love of books and reading. At the end of each day as I hugged a child before that child got on the bus, I would say "guess what I am going to do when I get home today". The child always knew the answer and would respond "read".

One of my favorite memories as a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher was teaching my lowest reading group one day. We were reading a very low leveled reading book that we had read many times. It was Stephanie's turn to read. She read her section and then looked up at me and said, "Mrs. Mobley, I love to read!!" Yeah Stephanie, it was a lot of hard work, but Stephanie loved to read. Why would any person want to work so hard unless they loved it!

The next question would be, how can anyone develop a love of books and reading without having books available to touch, look at, and explore? The Dolly Parton Imagination Library provides children and their families quality books to develop the passion and love for reading in children. Without that passion and love why would any child work so hard to learn something so difficult?

The goal is to improve 3<sup>rd</sup>-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.

Susan Mobley