

Thursday, March 2, 2023

RE: Department of Early Learning and Care Budget (HB 5013)

Co-Chairs Frederick & McLain, members of the Committee,

My name is Dana Hepper. I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Institute. Our vision is an Oregon where every child has the love, care and education they need. We have the joy of convening an Early Childhood Coalition, including more than 50 organizations across Oregon who serve and advocate for young children and their families.

Children's Institute and the Early Childhood Coalition strongly support the inclusion of needed increases to critical early learning and care programs in HB 5013.

Young children are born full of potential. Yet, children are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group ([US Census](#)). 113,000 children in Oregon live in poverty ([Kids Count](#)). 45,000 of these children are under the age of 6 ([Children's Defense Fund](#)). This means **Oregonians are most likely to live in poverty at exactly the same time their brains are experiencing the most rapid period of brain development**, making 1 million neural connections a second ([Harvard](#)).

This budget - the first in the state's history for a brand new state agency focused on young children and their families - represents a historic opportunity to invest in the potential of children. For the new Department to be successful, and for our children and families to thrive, this budget must make targeted investments in these areas:

- 1) **WORKFORCE.** Starting with a minimum 10% increase above Current Service Level for all early childhood programs, largely to support needed increases to compensation for the workforce, which is primarily women and women of color.

- 2) **EXPANDED ACCESS TO QUALITY PROGRAMS.** Specifically:
 - a) **CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES.** Young children are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than any other age group of Oregonians. This budget should include a minimum of \$10 million for the Early Childhood Equity Fund.

 - b) **SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES.** A \$21 million investment in Relief Nurseries and \$14 million investment in Healthy Families would provide proven effective support to build strong, stable families.

 - c) **CHILD CARE.** As close to the \$250 million policy option package 102 developed by the agency through the budgeting process to support increasing rates in our subsidy program, serving more families, and increasing navigation for providers and families.

 - d) **PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS.** The Governor has proposed pilots that investment in inclusion in early childhood programs for children with disabilities and delays; summer care to supplement school-year preschool; and local transportation solutions. We agree these are needed improvements.

- 3) **FACILITIES.** At least a \$100 million investment is an important first step to expanding the facilities infrastructure Oregon needs. (We understand this may not all be in the DELC budget, but they are a key partner.)

4) **AGENCY CAPACITY.** The new Department of Early Learning and Care needs resources, FTE, and tools to ensure they can deliver these needed investments to communities across Oregon, where they will make the greatest difference.

Thank you.