

**Testimony of Oregon Community Foundation on HB 3561**

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Chair Lively, Vice Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, Members of the House Committee on Higher Education:

Oregon Community Foundation urges your support for HB 3561, which expands the state's early childhood scholarship program to include behavioral health services.

Early care and learning has long been one of OCF's top priorities. That core investment strategy has included a focus on workforce for more than two decades through our funding partnerships with the state's community colleges to offer Betty Gray Scholarships.

As a statewide foundation, we hear frequently from communities around the state about the challenges child care programs face in finding qualified staff. Knowing the magnitude of unmet financial need, particularly for students from communities of color and rural communities, we were thrilled to see the state step forward four years ago to create an early childhood scholarship program through a partnership between the Early Learning Division and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. And given the invaluable services behavioral and mental health professionals can provide in early childhood care and learning settings, the program expansion language in HB 3561 represents a critical enhancement. Inclusion of professional development in behavioral health will also align with our state's vision – embodied in *Raise Up Oregon* – of a holistic approach to support for child development.

The state scholarship program has not yet been funded, and Oregon Community Foundation also strongly supports the funding proposed for this program through Higher Education Coordinating Commission POP 302.

Thank you for your commitment to Oregon's youngest children and their families. Please consider Oregon Community Foundation to be a partner and resource in this important work.