



Testimony on HB 3561
House Committee on Higher Education
March 14, 2023

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 3561.

There is plenty of evidence available that says what experts on early learning who will speak today will say: That Oregon is facing a severe shortage of available early childhood care and education professionals, and this is a leading cause of the unavailability of an adequate volume of available care and education settings around the state.

This bill makes modifications to a jointly operated scholarship program between HECC and ELD/DELIC designed to help incentivize students to choose early childhood education as a profession and to provide students with additional financial resources necessary to increase the likelihood of success in higher education, thus increasing the number of qualified early care and education professionals in Oregon. While the program is currently in statute, it has never been funded. This year, we are excited it has been included in the Governor's Recommended Budget at a level of \$5m for the biennium.

This bill makes two slight modifications to the program:

1. The bill expands the definition of eligible program participants so that is clear that aspiring early childhood behavioral and mental health service professionals can access the program.
2. It allows for a last-dollar program structure which considers other aid students receive. Neither the Commission nor ELD prefer such a structure and would not seek to implement one at the start of the program. But, the option allows for more flexibility in managing the program over time and also allows consideration of how other state aid programs, such as the Oregon Opportunity Grant, evolve.

HECC already has a track record of administering awards to aspiring educators. In partnership with the Educator Advancement Council and the Department of Education, we award grants to racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educator candidates pursuing an education degree at in-state educator preparation programs. Students can qualify for \$10,000 grants each year for two years for that program. In the current biennium, we made 352 awards, including both new students and renewal awards, and anticipate making a similar number in the coming two years.

Thank you for your time today.