

Submitter: Alexa Huffman  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

Dear Senator Hansel and Senator Findley,

My name is Alexa Huffman, and I am a family service specialist as well as a site director ,for one of our locations, for Eastern Oregon University Head Start. I have been with this organization for over four years now, and I cannot express enough how much our communities (Union and Baker County) as well as all Head Starts in Oregon need this funding.

Head Start is a free preschool program that services children between the ages of three and four, we also serve our students' families as a whole. As we near the end of the effects of COVID-19 our program has witnessed more families go through hardships, we have witnessed (as well as continuing to witness) students who have developed hard behaviors, and so much more. Our program strives in supporting the families in our program through academics, health, nutrition, basic needs, housing, and so much more. Eastern Oregon University Head Start, and all Head Start, employees put their heart and soul into serving the families in our community, but there have been challenges.

Due to low pay wages our program is struggling to hire highly qualified staff. We are having employees work in several different positions because it is hard for the program to be able to hire individuals that want to work for us, but not for the pay. Even for the employees that have been with the program for years, they have earned a pay raise for their dedication and hard work. It is crucial to raise our salaries for the employees of Eastern Oregon University Head Start, and all Head Starts across Oregon to equal wages of kindergarten teachers across the state. This would help support our current staff (educations, administrators, family support specialists, nutritionist, and mental health team) as well as bring in new employees in order to support our community and the families that we serve. Lastly, operating and building costs have significantly increased, and many Head Start programs don't have the classroom space needed to enroll more children. Overall, we need your help.

Thank you for the work that you do on the Ways and Means Committee to serve the children and families of Oregon. Please support SB 5506.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alexa Huffman  
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