

May 1, 2023

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider the importance of increasing the funding amount that goes toward early childhood education in SB 5506.

In particular, I am writing on behalf of Head Start, where I work as a CARE specialist. With my position, I work with preschoolers aged 3-5 who are part of the Head Start program. I particularly work with students who are struggling to be successful in their classroom because emotionally and socially they don't have the tools to navigate their day. Since the pandemic, we have seen an increasing number of children with challenging behaviors, language delays and developmental abilities below what you would expect for their chronological age. Across the board, there are many whose social and emotional development are showing delays. This truly is a crisis that our state and nation are facing and we need additional funding to support the gaps we are seeing.

Foremost, we are desperately in need of more teaching staff and support staff that are qualified and trained to help our youngest community members navigate post covid life successfully. If we are hoping to build strong communities within our state and nation, I truly believe it starts with supporting our youth. We can best provide the support they need by hiring highly qualified staff that are equipped with the education and experience to help them navigate the obstacles they face.

Unfortunately, our wages are not competitive with those of kindergarten teachers and school district support staff in our state. Which means many of the staff we would like to hire are not interested in our positions and the staff we are hiring isn't as prepared as they should be to handle the difficult situations they are faced with. Staff burn out rate is a reflection of teachers, teaching assistants and support staff who are overwhelmed and exhausted from trying to navigate many difficult situations that they have not received the education for. We are constantly short staffed because we are unable to fill positions at the wage we are offering, which adds to the burden of the staff we do have.

I urge you to consider the amount of funding that is going into early childhood education and the important role that Head Start plays in providing support for our youngest community members and their families.

Sincerely,

Kendra Sage
CARE Specialist
EOU Head Start