



# Family Building Blocks

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AND FAMILIES TOGETHER



March 5, 2023

Joint Ways and Means Committee  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

## **RE: Support HB 3005 for the Santiam Canyon**

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Co-Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and Committee members:



Family Building Blocks is writing in support of HB 3005, to create and invest in the Early Childhood Infrastructure Fund. This Fund will address the extreme lack of high-quality early childhood infrastructure and facilities. These facilities are essential to address the lack of child care, and improve access to quality early childhood programs, like Relief Nurseries, particularly in rural communities.

**The Legislature has made wise investments in quality early childhood programs like Relief Nurseries, and communities across Oregon support these organizations. Now is the time to protect these investments with a strong infrastructure.**



Family Building Blocks has submitted a request for \$720,000 to support the development of “**Doris’s New Place**”: a new build which will expand our ability to serve children 0 to 5 in the Santiam Canyon with Relief Nursery services. When we open the doors, we will immediately double our classrooms, from one to two, and have the ability to expand to up to five classrooms over time, which could be shared with community partners. It will also bring our food pantry, diaper bank, clothing closet, and classrooms all under one roof, increasing access to services for our families.



At Family Building Blocks, we believe that all parents want what is best for their children. The families we serve are facing overwhelming life circumstances and without intervention, child maltreatment and neglect is too often the outcome of such desperation.

In the Santiam Canyon, families are facing a unique set of stressors that when combined can jeopardize the safety of children and the health of the community. While an average American family faces three stressors putting them at risk for potential abuse and neglect, the families we partner with face, on average, ten toxic stressors. Families living in the Santiam Canyon face:

**\*Wildfires:** the community is still rebuilding from the devastating 2020 wildfires. A recent study by Oregon State University found that of those displaced by the fires, 87% remain in temporary housing. Housing loss increases stress on families and the likelihood of depression and anxiety.

**\*Financial Hardship:** 20% of children in the Santiam Canyon School District are living in poverty. This rate is higher than the number of children in poverty in Marion County (15%), the State (12.9%) and the Nation (16.1%). (Source: US Census 2021) For students across the Canyon (Santiam School District, Cascade School District and North Santiam School District), nearly 40% are economically disadvantaged. (Source: Oregon Department of Education School District 2021-22 Report Cards).

**\*Rural Location:** The Santiam Canyon's rural setting increases barriers to accessing services, like healthcare, lack of public transportation and more.

**\*Child Care:** The Santiam Canyon is a child care desert – meaning there are more than three pre-school age children for every child care slot available. For infants and toddlers its eight children for every one slot. The Ford Family Foundation's report "Systemic Inequities of Child Care in Rural Oregon" shows that Oregon's child care system consistently disadvantages babies and rural areas.

**Child care and early childhood facilities** are essential community infrastructure. Our entire economy is dependent on equitable access to child care and early childhood programs. Like roads and bridges, affordable, quality early learning and care is necessary infrastructure.

- **Parents** need care that provides a peace of mind that their children are learning and loved.
- **Employers** need their employees to have access to reliable, affordable care so they can work.
- **Children** need care that supports their social and emotional wellbeing and the development of their brains and bodies to build a strong foundation that supports lifelong outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Patrice Altenhofen

Executive Director