



Columbia Gorge Education Service District
Dedicated to Enhancing Education Opportunities

May 5, 2023

Dear Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Committee,

Columbia Gorge ESD provides early learning and early intervention services in Wasco County. This week our early childhood intervention team worked with two new single parent families who are houseless due to a lack of childcare. These families are doing everything they can to find childcare. They are doing everything right. The only reason they are houseless is they cannot work because they do not have access to child care. Every week we support families in similar situations. The situation is not new or localized to Wasco County. It is a crisis.

For the last 3 years, Columbia Gorge Education Service District and Columbia Gorge Community College along with multiple community partners have been working together to explore solutions to address our region's child care crisis. The scarcity of affordable public child care is a social issue, a family issue, and an economic issue. The issue cuts across socio-economic levels. When we speak with industry leaders in the Columbia Gorge, their greatest challenges in terms of employee recruitment and retention are affordable housing and affordable child care. The expansion of our economy demands that we address both of those urgent needs.

In The Dalles we propose to renovate a former middle school as a large capacity, affordable public child care center. It will require significant capital outlay to convert a beloved unused Middle school into an early learning center, but an exhaustive search of the community finds no alternatives. We anticipate this to be a \$15,000,000 project and we are requesting \$7 million from the State. The result will be the restoration of a historic building to meet substantial community need for childcare in our county. The facility will be used as a training site for students in the early learning program at the community college to address work force issues.

Once we get the facility finished, our community partners stand ready to help sustain operations, affordably both for working families and families that need childcare to be able to work. That's our goal. I encourage your support of the project mentioned above and \$100 Million total funding for House Bill 3005. Section 7 of HB 5030, the Child Care Facility Capacity Program Fund, would provide an important resource to help resolve the child care crisis.

Thank you.

Patricia Sublette, Ph.D.
Superintendent,