

Submitter: Jim Schepcke
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5514

Dear Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and members of the Joint Committee:

I write in support of SB 5514, the biennial budget of the Department of Early Learning and Care, and in particular, support of continued funding for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library in Oregon.

For the past two years I have been a volunteer with the Marion and Polk Early Learning Hub to start up the Imagination Library in Marion and Polk Counties. From 1991 until 2011 I was the State Librarian of Oregon, and during that time I made it my highest priority to grow and support the work of public libraries throughout Oregon to serve young children and their families so that all of our children could develop a love of reading before they get to kindergarten. In my retirement I have found another way to continue that work.

Having gone too long without an Imagination Library program in Salem where I live, I was thrilled when our Early Learning Hub led by Lisa Harnisch agreed to take it on. We started with just three zip codes in Salem and Keizer and one in Falls City. I helped with the necessary fund-raising, but my greatest joy was to get out to community events to sign up children.

Long story short, we now have all of Marion and Polk Counties covered because of many generous donors. We have presently have over 7,300 children enrolled to receive a free book every month from Dolly. That's about a third of all eligible children in our two counties. And we won't stop until we have every child enrolled!

State matching funds have been a key to our success. Donors are much more generous when they learn that their money will be matched. Governor Kotek's strong support has also been a real plus. The Department of Early Learning and Care has done an excellent job of managing the program in partnership with the Dollywood Foundation that has now hired two staff members to work here in Oregon.

As of today we are just two zip codes away from having the entire state in the program. Those zip codes are in Reedsport, where I have been working with the public library there to become an affiliate, and have secured grant funding for them to do so. When we have them in the program and have covered the entire state, I understand we will be qualified to receive a program option to have children receive all bilingual books (Spanish-English) if their parents or caregivers want that option.

That will be wonderful! It is a much-needed option in Salem and other communities in the state.

I urge your support of SB 5514 and the continuation of state funding for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library in Oregon.

Jim Scheppke
Salem