

April 4, 2025

Dear Chairs Valderrama and Campos and Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Human Services

I am writing to express my support for Oregon's Regional Family Networks and to share the impact that Families Connected/Familias en Conexión- the Regional Family Network serving Lane County - has had on hundreds of families served through the local early intervention and early childhood special education program (Early Childhood CARES) in Lane County over the years. And I am asking that you pass SB 5526 which restores funding to these critically important programs.

Families Connected/Familias en Conexión is a family-led organization supporting parents in their journey of raising children with intellectual and developmental disabilities across Lane County. Families Connected and Familias en Conexión provides services and supports across a geographically expansive county with rural, urban and suburban communities. Often times families who are raising children with disabilities want to connect with other families in similar situations for information and support. This is the only local organization that makes these connections happen and nurtures them.

Early Childhood CARES serves children and families as they first learn about their child's disability and adjust to their "new normal" life situation. Connecting with other families who are experiencing the same adjustments and to families who have older children and youth who can share their experience and wisdom is invaluable to so many families. These connections stay with the family over the years of parenting and can help guide and support families through transitions into school, from elementary to middle school and middle to high school and then to a meaningful life. Network families help each other navigate access to community resources and to community activities. There are no other supports or services connecting peers with other families who have lived experience and who can understand and relate and provide support and help.

Families Connected & Familias en Conexión help parents navigate systems that span all sectors families are involved with including education, health, disability services. Families learn to be effective advocates for their children and youth. And help and support is provided in English and/or Spanish and are culturally grounded.

I have seen first hand over many years how Regional Family Networks are a lifeline for parents raising children with disabilities. The Family Networks help reduce isolation and the number of families going into crisis. The Family Networks strengthen families by giving them hope and direction. Again, I urge you pass SB 5526 which restores funding to these critically important programs.

Sincerely,

Judy Newman, Senior Advisor and Co-founder of Early Childhood CARES