

Submitter: Ernesto Toskovic
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear President Wagner, Speaker Fahey, Co-Chair Senator Lieber, and Co-Chair Representative Sanchez:

We are writing to urge your support for the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries' (OARN) \$4.9 million funding request above the Governor's Recommended Budget to sustain services for over 2,300 children and families and to reach up to 300 more children statewide.

Oregon's 38 Relief Nurseries provide children, birth through age five, and their families with wraparound child development and parental support services to keep young children safe, strengthen families, prevent abuse, and reduce costly foster care. In addition to Therapeutic Early Childhood Program classrooms, Outreach and Respite Child Care, Home Visiting, and Parenting Education, many Relief Nurseries also provide integrated substance use disorder recovery support and behavioral and mental health counseling services.

The Relief Nursery model is both an effective model for harm reduction and a responsible investment for the state. Oregon's Relief Nurseries are effective at reducing child maltreatment and costly foster care, with 95% of enrolled children able to remain safely with their families. Funded through a public-private partnership, Relief Nurseries provide a minimum 25% community match for every dollar the state invests. The program also provides an estimated \$2-4 return on every dollar spent thanks to improved educational outcomes, increased future taxes paid by participants, and reductions in child abuse, neglect, crime, and need for publicly funded services.

Due to rising costs and the growing need for services, the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) of \$28.8 million will not be enough to respond to the additional and rapidly changing needs of communities and families in crisis. We ask for your support of HB 3933, which provides an additional \$4.9 million above the GRB for Relief Nurseries.

Without additional funding, some Relief Nurseries will not be able to increase staff in their Home Visiting and Outreach programs. Therapeutic Early Childhood Program classrooms at some Relief Nurseries will remain empty, waiting lists at other Relief Nurseries will remain static or grow, and other Relief Nurseries will not be able to increase days in the classroom for children whom we know additional time and consistency is extremely beneficial for childhood development and lifelong mental

health.

We ask that you prioritize Relief Nurseries in the legislative budget by providing an additional \$4.9 million to sustain current programs and expand vital Relief Nursery services which strengthen families and keep children safe across Oregon.

Sincerely,
Ernesto Toskovic