

To: The Oregon Legislature

Re: Special Session Priorities

Date: August 6, 2020

From: Oregon's Early Childhood Coalition

Dear Leaders of Oregon,

The Early Childhood Coalition thanks you for demonstrating your commitment to Oregon's youngest children in the 2019 legislative session. In these unprecedented times, we ask you to uphold this commitment and prioritize the needs of our youngest children and families furthest from opportunity and who bear the disproportionate weight of COVID-19.

The effects of the pandemic on Oregon's youngest children and families have laid bare the deep racial inequities and injustices against Black, Indigenous, and people of color. As you know, the health, education, housing and early learning systems were not designed by and for these communities. What we are now witnessing are the consequences of this exclusion. The striking difference in access to opportunity and public services, and corresponding disparities in health, education, and economic outcomes these Oregonians are facing is devastating. As the pandemic continues, these disparities are widening.

As a network of over 40+ organizations, our coalition partners have worked tirelessly in community-driven response to both COVID-19 and the pandemic of racial injustice. We have seen and heard directly the needs of Black, Indigenous, and families of color across urban and rural settings. Community based organizations and networks like Early Learning Hubs are uniquely positioned to connect parents to culturally specific and holistic systems support for health and early learning. These services uplift community self-determination and mitigate disparities by ensuring every young child and family has what they need to thrive.

We have a tremendous opportunity to impact meaningful change for generations if we listen to Black, Indigenous, and communities of color and invest in strategies that support self-determination, child and family resilience, well-being, and school readiness. We ask you to continue Oregon's commitment to the Early Learning Account as part of a sustained movement for a racially just and equitable future.

We specifically ask you to:

- Hold ourselves accountable to the original intent of the Student Success Act by honoring the co-chairs' full \$170 million allocated to early childhood and protecting the dedicated 20 percent of the Student Success Act flowing into the Early Learning Account.
- Prioritize investments that are specifically designed to advance racial equity – the Early Childhood Equity Fund, Student Success Plans for Black/African American students, American Indian/Alaskan Native students, and Latino/a students.
- Uphold developmental support for building early childhood systems – Early Learning Hubs, Focused Child Care Networks, and Healthy Families Oregon.

When we prioritize investments that center the needs of Black, Indigenous, and children of color, early childhood programs and services can mitigate disparities by race/ethnicity, income, geography, disability, language, immigrant and refugee status, houselessness and foster care. When we work with intention to dismantle systemic barriers for our children furthest from justice, all of Oregon’s children have the opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,

