



February 21, 2022

**RE: Wage Parity for Relief Nurseries and Healthy Families Oregon**

Distinguished Legislators,

During the 2021 legislative session, the Early Childhood Coalition put forward a shared legislative agenda, guided by the experiences of Black and Native families, families of color; and families and providers that are historically and presently excluded from policy and budget decisions from across Oregon. In 2021, the Oregon Legislature made significant progress to advance early childhood policies. In the 2022 legislative session, we continue to advocate where additional progress is needed.

Specifically, **Oregon must continue to raise wages across early childhood programs to recognize and retain skilled, diverse staff in every region of the state.** Raising wages in Relief Nurseries and Healthy Families Oregon is a wise next step as we have raised wages in Preschool Promise and Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten. Women and women of color have historically done the critical work in early childhood without fair compensation; our early childhood providers should not live in poverty. Early childhood programs are effective because they build deep relationships with families and children, and support the self-determination of families. Stabilizing a skilled, diverse staff improves services for children and families.

**In the 2022 legislative session, the Early Childhood Coalition is supporting these investments that were incomplete in 2021:**

- \$2.8 million investment in Relief Nurseries to achieve wage parity with other early childhood programs to reduce turnover and improve consistency for 3500 children served.
- \$3.746 million investment in Healthy Families Oregon to raise wages to be comparable with other early childhood programs to support retention and recruitment of staff for 2300 families served.
- \$275,000 investment to continue Healthy Families Oregon services in Tillamook and Jefferson counties, which have lost the Federal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding. The full biennial cost to restore funding is \$245,660 in Tillamook and \$130,000 in Jefferson.

Oregon's children ages 0-5 are the most racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse Oregonians; they are also the most likely group to live in poverty. While children have not faced the primary impact of getting sick from COVID-19, they have encountered some of the greatest secondary impacts at a time when their brains are rapidly developing. This includes an increased risk for child abuse and neglect as a result of increased stress and social isolation of families ([CDC](#), 2020), as well as the exacerbated impacts of structural racism embedded in health and education systems. Early childhood experiences set the stage for complex neural, social, and emotional development, making early childhood a critical window in which to

eliminate disparities and ensure that young children have access to the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

