

Ruth Stellmacher

From: Jim Scheppke <jscheppke@comcast.net>
Sent: Friday, November 25, 2022 11:54 AM
To: CityRecorder
Cc: citycouncil
Subject: Testimony on Agenda Item 6a at the 11/28/22 Council Meeting

Mayor Hoy and Members of the Salem City Council:

The new 2022-27 Salem Public Library Strategic Plan that is being presented to the Council tonight includes an initiative to "Invest in existing and new partnerships that further mutual goals and help the library connect with underserved areas of the community."

One of these new partnerships I would like the Council to consider is with the Marion-Polk Early Learning Hub. In July the Early Learning Hub became an affiliate of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, a project that Dolly Parton began nearly three decades ago. The Imagination Library sends a free, high quality, age-appropriate book every month to children from birth until they turn five. Research shows that the program has been successful in improving children's reading readiness and in putting them on the path to becoming proficient readers.

I am a volunteer for this project. Because of funding limitations we are currently only able sign up children in four zip codes in Marion and Polk Counties. Those zip codes are 97301, 97303, 97344 and 97351. The Early Learning Hub chose 97301 to start with in Salem because it has the highest number of underserved children that will benefit from receiving a book every month. We hope to add additional zip codes in the Salem area when the Early Learning Hub has additional funding.

I am happy to report that since the end of July we have already signed up nearly 700 children in the four zip codes. We have formed a strong partnership with the Keizer Community Library for the 97303 zip code. We are nearing 300 children signed up in Keizer, mostly because of the efforts of the Keizer library.

I am coming to you tonight to ask that the Salem Public Library make the same strong effort to be our partner as the Keizer library has. The Salem Public Library has been reluctant to partner with us because we can, for now, only sign up children in 97301, and not in all eight zip codes in Salem.

Each zip code we serve represents a substantial financial commitment by the Early Learning Hub. We are working hard to increase our funding from private funders and we hope to see a bill in the upcoming Legislature for state matching funds for all of the affiliates in Oregon.

But it may be some time before we are able to serve all eight zip codes in Salem. In the meantime, many underserved children in the 97301 zip code may be missing out on their opportunity to receive a free book every month.

I ask that the City Council provide policy direction to the Salem Public Library to indicate your desire to see underserved children in the 97301 zip code begin to participate in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library with sign-up assistance from our library.

Thank you for your service,

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