



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Way's Funding for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Left Out of Washington State's Draft Budget - Impacting Local Kids

Tri-Cities, WA (March 25, 2025) – In a move that has disappointed many educators, parents, and children's advocates, Washington State lawmakers have released a draft budget for the upcoming fiscal year that does not include funding for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a program that allows United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties to send books to local kids every month at no cost to their families, helping to prepare them for school and fostering a lifelong love of reading.

In 2024 United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties sent 67,117 books to local kids through our partnership with DPIL and program donors and sponsors. 5,837 local kids will receive an Imagination Library book in April. However, the newly released draft budget for the state does not allocate funding for this vital program, putting its continued success in our area and state at risk. Without this critical funding from the state the number of kids we will be able to service through the program will drastically decrease or diminish.

"We are deeply concerned that this essential program, which has made a significant difference in the lives of countless children and families in our area, is not included in the state's proposed budget," said Asta Bonheyo, Community Impact Director, United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties. "Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has been a proven tool for closing the literacy gap, ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have access to books and the opportunity to succeed in school."

Imagination Library operates in Washington through local partnerships, grants, donor support and program sponsors, but many states, including Washington, have also supported the program through the help of public funding. The absence of state support in the draft budget jeopardizes the sustainability of this initiative in the state and threatens the program's ability to reach even more children in need. Without these dollars, our book costs for United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties will double from \$1.30/book to \$2.60/book, for 2025, this would increase our book costs by over \$55,000.

Advocates for early childhood education are calling on lawmakers to revisit the budget and prioritize funding for programs like Dolly Parton's Imagination Library that have proven to make a real difference in the lives of children and families.

Lawmakers are expected to continue deliberating the budget in the coming weeks. As advocates for the Imagination Library program United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties is urging the public to contact their representatives and encourage them to prioritize funding for this important initiative.

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