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June 18th, 2015

To: Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee
From: Ashley Jackson, ASLCC
RE: HB 2015

Co-chair Nathanson, Co-chair Bate, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ashley Jackson and I am a first generation student parent born and raised in the Eugene/Springfield Area.

I am the student body president for the Associated Students of Lane Community College, a voting member on the Board of Directors for the Oregon Student Association and a Ford Family Foundation Opportunity Scholar: Class of 2015.

I am here in support of HB 2015 which will provide much needed stability to parents going to school by allowing them to receive Employment Related Day Care.

My experience with Department of Human Services started at 16 when I enrolled my son in OHP. (My mom was a single mother with 3 kids therefore my experience likely started when I was a small child.) A year after I opened my case, I married and moved into an apartment with my husband. I was proud to not be taking state aid for food. After their deployment to Iraq, we faced struggles of violence and abuse. I left him and went to a safe place in Linn-Benton County. There I was told by a DHS caseworker that if I moved back in with him and reapplied for the domestic violence grant to help us find a home, they would grant it. So I proceeded into the world jobless, houseless with two sweet children and no money. I knew if I went back, I faced uncertainty for the safety for my infant daughter, 4 year old son and myself. I've been enrolled with SNAP, OHP and ERDC intermittently since 2011 when we first left.

After a year working at jobs that paid between minimum wage and \$12 an hour, full time, I realized I was stuck in a trap. I couldn't make enough to pay the childcare it took to be able to have the job in the first place. I chose school as my way out. I know other single moms and dads who have chosen drugs, theft, prostitution, and even suicide over the dead end jobs and they never considered school as they'd been out priced from that route of success. I didn't know when entering college how expensive it would be. All I knew was that I was still starving, even when I had a full time job. I couldn't sustain my family like that. I wanted to be self-sufficient.

For the first year of school I was afraid to tell my caseworker at DHS that I was enrolled because they had so strongly discouraged me when I brought it up. I was still working a job and trying to juggle all the schedules; work schedules, Thomas' schedule for school, Thomas' afterschool schedule, Tean's childcare schedule, my class schedules, my student government involvement, my extended family and many illnesses, court dates and child custody mitigations, DHS Classes and communications, counseling appointments for all three of us, and I prayed daily to keep me healthy because single parents don't get sick leave or support to rebound.



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I eventually cancelled my ERDC, enrolled in more credits per term and committed further to my studies. That was my hardest year. At the end of every term I was phone-less and starving. I am blessed to be in a community with people that were so willing to share their beds, their bathrooms, their food, their phones, and their resources with us.

After that very hard year, I was offered the CCAMPIS Grant through the Lane Child and Family Center. Thanks to the dedication of the administration from that department, I had 70% of childcare paid for one of my two children and the opportunity to work off the rest. Thanks to them, my academic future gained traction. Thanks to that grant that treats my credit hours like a job, I've maintained a stellar GPA and academic transcript. This grant that ensured my success including, but not limited to, obtaining a full ride scholarship is very similar to the kind of support Employment Related Day Care gives to stabilize the most vulnerable families.

I need to be clear that this the current requirements of the ERDC framework stop of parents within the DHS system from gaining financial independence because it prevents them from further their careers and this happen sometimes in subtle ways, but even when I first checked in at the front desk I was asked if I was from around here. I said yes, they looked surprised and I asked why. They said I sounded intelligent. I was born and raised here in this part of Oregon and I understand what that person was getting at. Not very many people that go to the DHS counter for help will ever see the steps of a higher learning institution like Lane Community College. Even fewer will be in the halls of the representatives that have the power to change these services that are discouraging not only family's growth and prosperity, but the community enrichment that we all benefit from when those around us are educated.

After I reapplied for benefits through DHS, as a student, I was discouraged in direct counseling by a case manager from taking a role in student leadership. . I was discouraged from going to school at all! I was told that I needed to add another WorkSource jobs class to my schedule to develop something that I had developed already in my research, writing, and public speaking courses. I was unable to access ERDC for my job as president because it doesn't count as real work. Yet today, I am here to urge your support for something that will improve access for the ones who need it the most. This is for the next generation just as much as the students it will help now. Everyone knows education and parenting go hand in hand. We have to protect those who are most vulnerable economically and address issues that hinder the progress towards stability. HB 2015 is a great step in that direction.

Today, I am a Ford Scholar. I have school paid for and I know that I will be okay. I know one day I will be sitting in one of those chairs trying to bring the change that we all want to see in Oregon. But so many students are still struggling to figure out how to feed their kids and improve their chance at bright futures. Too many students will be told when they try to succeed, move forward, and claim the education that they deserve, that they should take a job at McDonald's for 15 hours or more a week. Let's make it so that our student parents can focus on their studies, their families and gaining economic independence.



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If I wasn't a student, I would not be able to say that I was the president of ASLCC or a Ford Scholar: Class of 2015 if I had not persevered through economic hardship and discouragement. These are just a few of the benefits I have accessed and received in my time as a student that will serve me well in my search for a job that can allow me to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Today, you can help other students who aren't as lucky as me. Please see safe passage to HB 2015. Thank you for the work you've done and for your continued support of students of all ages.

In peace and power,

Ashley Jean Jackson