



March 18, 2020

Co-chair Roblan, Co-chair Holvey, and Members of the Joint Special Committee,

In January 2020, Our Children Oregon brought together Children First for Oregon and the Children's Trust Fund of Oregon. We continue to work with our 120 Children Agenda partner organizations to identify and elevate legislative concepts to improve child well-being as we support the needs of Oregon's children - our children.

Our state, our country and our world are facing a crisis as we figure out how we respond to the Covid-19 pandemic including both the health and economic implications. We appreciate your willingness to work together on behalf of Oregonians to mitigate the current crisis and hopefully lay a path for recovery that will allow us to emerge with systems in place to support families and communities so that all children can thrive.

As you consider potential solutions, please **prioritize resources for the Oregonians in greatest need**. The Oregonians in greatest need are often members of historically oppressed communities because systemic racism means that many black, indigenous, and people of color work in low wage jobs without economic security, and are at particular risk during this time of crisis.

We also want to elevate the need for all of us to think creatively about how to maintain social connections during this time of social distancing in order to help make sure our children are safe. As discussed during the Child Welfare Advisory Council meeting today, calls to the Child Abuse Hotline are down, and at the same time 90% of mandatory reporters no longer have eyes on children with schools closed, and preventative health care appointments delayed. We know from the Child Welfare Data Book that financial stress, unemployment, and housing instability, along with parent drug/alcohol abuse and mental health issues, are key factors when there are abuse findings, **so now more than ever we must try to ensure that our families have the supports they need to keep all of our children safe**. These supports need to include the items below, as well as changes to Unemployment Insurance to get dollars to Oregon families as quickly as possible.

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www.cffo.org

(503) 236-9754

You have already received testimony from several Children's Agenda partners on the following issues, so I ask that you look to their testimony as linked in each topic for more details.

Housing Stability

We know that too many Oregon families were already rent-burdened before this crisis. See the [Housing Alliance testimony](#) for detailed suggestions on:

- Rental and mortgage assistance
- Moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent and suspension of late fees
- Take steps to address homelessness

Food Access

This crisis has elevated the public's understanding of the key role that school meals play in making sure children get regular meals, and we support the Governor's request that school districts provide "grab and go" meals, as well as the federal legislation to expand SNAP benefits. [Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon](#) provides an overview of ensuring access to food during this crisis.

Self-Sufficiency, Oregon Health Plan and Public Benefits

Our safety net infrastructure is already very fragile, and now even more families will need access to public support. We ask that there is a moratorium on all OHP, SNAP, TANF, and other public benefit terminations during the state of emergency. Both the [Oregon Law Center](#) and the [Oregon Center for Public Policy](#) have suggestions to streamline and expand public benefit programs that are worth your careful consideration. In addition, the [Oregon Law Center](#) lays out some immediate changes that state and local governments and courts should make to their criminal, traffic and municipal ordinance fines and fees policies to help families manage during this crisis.

Child Care

There was a robust conversation during your committee meeting today about the need for child care for first responders and health care workers. However, there are other essential jobs where we need people to show up, from stocking grocery shelves to making Child Protective Service visits, and those workers also need to have access to child care for their children. [Children's Institute](#) and [Family Forward](#) have both provided testimony on child care.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts and priorities

Sincerely,
Chris Coughlin
Legislative Director

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