

March 20, 2020

Chairs Roblan, Holvey, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your preliminary recommendations on how to support Oregonians during the COVID-19 global pandemic. We are The Oregon Childcare Project, a coalition of culturally-specific organizations leading the call for public childcare in Oregon.

Childcare is a basic human need, and is required for workforce participation and access to critical services, including healthcare and education. While our modern workforce is gender diverse, childcare – both paid and unpaid – remains a labor carried out primarily by women.

- 7 of 10 Oregon mothers also work for pay.<sup>1</sup>
- 94% of Oregon’s childcare workers are women – disproportionately women of color and immigrant women.
- Working parents constitute a third of the Oregon workforce<sup>2</sup>.

Serving as both caregivers and financial providers, mothers and childcare workers today play a major role in promoting the health – both physical and financial – of their families, neighborhoods, and communities. For this reason, an investment benefitting Oregon mothers and childcare providers has community-wide benefits. Inversely, distressed mothers and childcare providers are the proverbial canary in a coal mine.

With the shut down of places of business, schools, child care centers and mass layoffs, mothers – and, consequently, their children – are indeed experiencing extraordinary distress brought on by COVID-19:

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<sup>1</sup> [Center for American Progress \(2017\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [State of Oregon Employment Department \(2019\)](#)

- All of Oregon’s 36 counties are “child care deserts” — a classification used where there is one child care slot for every three children who need care.<sup>3</sup> By increasing demand, COVID-19 threatens an already precarious industry and forces families into impossible situations.
- In Oregon, childcare is a family’s greatest expense<sup>4</sup>, costing more than average rent and more than in-state college tuition. A typical family spends 38.5% of its income on child care; a typical child care worker spends 55.2% of her earnings to put her own child in care. The coronavirus-induced recession will only exacerbate unaffordability, turning already high childcare costs into astronomical burdens on families and low-wage workers.

On top of navigating the worst childcare shortage in Oregon’s history, the mothers and childcare providers in our community are also contending with systemic inequities across race and gender:

- Wage gaps are much wider for women of color, mothers, and especially women of color who are mothers.<sup>5</sup>
- Black, Indigenous, and other people of color in Oregon’s workforce have the highest labor force participation; the lowest wages; and the highest unemployment rates<sup>6</sup>.
- According to OHEA, “people of color in Oregon are sicker and die younger than white people in Oregon; face an increased risk for chronic disease, cancer, and reduced life expectancy.”<sup>7</sup>

We believe that any successful COVID-19 response plan shall account for the structural racism, sexism, and private sector failures outlined above.

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<sup>3</sup> [Oregon State University](#) (2019)

<sup>4</sup> [Economic Policy Institute](#) (2019)

<sup>5</sup> [National Women’s Law Center](#) (2017)

<sup>6</sup> [State of Oregon Employment Department](#) (2020)

<sup>7</sup> [Oregon Health Equity Alliance](#) (2016)

Unfortunately, this committee's plan as drafted does not consider inequities, and in fact makes no mention whatsoever of race, racism, or Oregonians of color.

We find it unacceptable, in times of crisis, for this committee not to integrate the many millions of dollars' worth of public investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings into its statewide emergency response planning efforts. If we are to ensure that as many Oregonians as possible can maintain some semblance of stability during this global pandemic, now is not the time to be silent on race and gender. Now is the time to apply our training, to be bold, and to **lead with race and gender** – or we risk returning our state to a much darker time in its history.

We demand the following immediate measures to relieve Oregon's mothers, parents, childcare providers, Black, Indigenous, and other constituencies of color:

1. **Make language accessibility a priority for all emergency efforts.**
2. **Grant emergency child care assistance to all parents and caregivers required to work during the COVID-19 outbreak.**
  - a. Define essential workers - and enforce requirements for non-essential employees to be off work or teleworking with appropriate wage support. Decisions about who needs to keep working during this crisis cannot be left up to employers. ("Essential workers" applies to those providing needed services, like: caregivers, senior care providers, first responders, health care providers, nurses, hospital workers, civil service and utilities employees, grocery store and pharmacy employees - and those providing child care to these employees.)
  - b. Temporarily remove Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC) income eligibility limits to serve Essential Employees.
  - c. Allow temporary enrollment of parents who are entering or re-entering the workforce as Essential Employees during the COVID-19 outbreak.
  - d. Allow continued enrollment of parents who change their childcare provider. The primary child care provider may be closed, or the

parent's location of work may have changed, or the parent's work schedule may have changed.

- e. Temporarily ease regulatory requirements on substitute and Friend, Family, and Neighbor Care (FFN) providers. Ease background checks and training requirements to address the emergency shortage of providers and the unique child care needs of rural communities. These providers may be providing care to Essential Employees or to those who are teleworking.
- f. Temporarily suspend redetermination of family eligibility for child care services to ensure that temporary changes in family workforce

**3. Maintain the availability of child care.** When childcare providers are small business owners, we must protect their sustainability—and create additional capacity—when their services are most needed. Though child care centers must close now to all but Essential Employees, the following economic supports are needed to ensure the availability of critical child care services at scale once this crisis resolves.

- a. Adjust subsidy payment policies to be based on child care enrollment rather than attendance. Waive any policies that terminate eligibility for subsidies based on attendance. This will allow more parents and children to stay home during this crisis without disrupting revenue for childcare providers.
- b. Allow childcare providers to waive co-pays for families impacted by changes to their own work schedules and income, and adjust reimbursement rates accordingly to prevent loss of income for the childcare provider. Institute a ban on furloughs and salary reductions for the staff of providers receiving subsidy payments.
- c. Help childcare providers cover the additional costs of maintaining their operations safely during this time, including necessary sanitation equipment, supplies and services; substitute caregivers; paid leave for affected staff; copayments for coronavirus tests; grants to cover operational costs in the event of closure; and other expenses that will occur as the result of coronavirus spread.
- d. Provide small business assistance in the form of emergency grants and wage replacement (for all childcare providers, small business owners, and their staff) when closures occur and/or to compensate for reduced business during this crisis, as well as the cost of returning to previous service levels after the crisis.

4. **Expand upon the federal protections for paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave to people who work in businesses of over 500 employees. This should include:**

- a. State requirement that all employers provide paid sick time and paid family and medical leave to all employees, under the same conditions as H.R.6201 (Families First Coronavirus Response Act)

**Signed,**

The Oregon Childcare Project. A project led by six organizations: PCUN, Oregon Futures Lab, Asian American Network of Oregon, PAALF Action Fund, Family Forward Action, and Unite Oregon Action.



**Additional co-signers:**



Coalition of Communities of Color



SEIU Local 503