

To whom may concern,

I am writing this letter to bring attention to the hardships we have experienced in order to send my child, [REDACTED], to a qualified headstart/pre-k school.

I live in Vale, OR where the availability to a head start program is limited. We only have one option. Unfortunately, we did not qualify because I went over the allowable low-income standards. With my income alone, I did qualify. However, because I had my son, a college student, living with me I was also told I had to report *his* income, which placed me BARELY over the income limit by \$200. His income, however, he used to help pay his education expenses. I worked a full-time minimum wage job, and could not afford to pay for child care, so getting my child into the head start program was crucial to me. I was denied.

After this denial, I decided to try my chances at Oregon Child Development Center in Ontario, OR. Before even applying, I was informed that there was no transportation available for children living in Vale. If I wanted my child to attend, I would have to transport him to and from the facility in a restrained time frame. This was simply not feasible because I did not have a set work-schedule. The time from my home to the school was 25 minutes. Some days I had to go in to work at 6am, so taking my child at 7am was not possible. Some days I would get out of work at 8pm, so picking up my child at 4pm was not possible either. This was extremely frustrating.

I began to notice that my child's speech was delayed. I had him tested for disabilities; and although he was not diagnosed with any, the Speech Therapist told me he lacked social skills, which could be developed if he had more interaction with kids his age. The therapist also told me that he needed Speech Therapy to help his speech development. They told me to try to apply to OCDC again, because they were going to try to offer transportation for Vale children. I qualified for the program and he was able to attend, finally. Attending OCDC helped him dramatically with his speech and language. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school was shut down and he did not attend the next season.

Once the school was approved to reopen in June, I was contacted that he would qualify for the summer session, but again, there would be no transportation from Vale. I was forced to deny the acceptance because I would not be able to transport my child every day. This was a huge disappointment because school had proven to help his speech and social skills. For him to not be able to attend would mean another delay in his development. I was devastated and frustrated.

My oldest daughter moved to Ontario so we had to take the sad decision to leave my son with her during the weekdays so that he would be able to attend school. I was forced to sacrifice my time with my son so that he could get the attention he needs so as to not affect his social and mental development. My son is almost 3 years old, and is at the age where he needs his mother's affection. But because schools are not properly funded to assist more families, I have to go days without seeing my son so that he can attend

school. This has taken a huge toll on my emotional well-being. I am happy to see him getting better at his speech, but I am saddened that I cannot spend more quality time with him.

I hope my experience has given you an insight as to the struggles low-income families face and the tough decisions we sometimes have to make.

With regards,

Norma Gonzalez

