

February 20th, 2019

To: The House Housing and Human Services Committee

From: Doris Towery,

Re: Support of HB 2346, HB 2348, and HB 2024

Dear Chair Keny Guyer,

My name is Doris Towery and I live in McMinnville. My husband and I moved to Oregon with a four-month-old baby. I was beginning a new job as the Publisher of two small local papers in Springfield and Cottage Grove, we had no family even remotely close to support us and we knew we would need help with the care of this beautiful baby we had waited so long to bring into our lives. At the time, my husband had been running his own consulting company from our home, because we could not find quality child care in Montana before we made the move. We came to Oregon because this is where we wanted to raise our family and set down roots to provide the quality of life we dreamed of for our family. I am a first-generation college graduate who worked two jobs to get myself through school. I love and value my family above everything, but I value using my skills and talent to make a difference in my community. I knew I would be a better Mom if I could still pursue my career while being a parent. Once we settled into our new home, I did some research and found a connection at Lane Community College who gave us a list of providers in our area as well as questions to ask as we interviewed providers. Having no knowledge of the Springfield area we began making calls to the people on the list and setting up appointments. We were hopeful that we would have many to choose from and at the same time a bit overwhelmed with the cost. As we began our search there were several places when we arrived, we never even went in. We drove away, me in tears, thinking I wouldn't leave my dog to be cared for there, let alone my child. I was appalled at best and quite frankly completely disheartened. After weeks of this process we ended up getting on a waitlist for The Learning Tree Day Care Center and our family made the decision that my husband would stay home with our son to care for him while continuing to run his consulting business from home. We are among the very few who are blessed enough to be in careers that allowed us the luxury to have one of us stay home.

We finally got a spot for our son just as my husband was taking a job with Lane County and our son was turning one. We moved him to Oak Street Day Care when he was just over two because they had a robust preschool program and teachers who were highly trained in early child development. We also knew we would be planning to have another baby and Oak Street was one of only three centers who had an infant care program and the least expensive of the options because they had a subsidy from the federal government to care for children of federal and local government workers. Our daughter came along when our

son was just turning four. The day care center were the first people we told we were expecting, even before our family or my employer. We knew we would need to get on a waitlist for our new baby as soon as possible. We had the advantage that families with siblings already in care would move up the list. Even with that advantage, and 9 months of time on the list, a spot didn't open for our daughter until she was four-months-old. I could only take eight weeks off with her using all my sick and vacation time and still having to have a few weeks unpaid. I was working for a non-profit by the time she arrived. Once again, I was incredibly fortunate that I worked for a wonderful organization and I could bring my daughter to work with me for her first two months until our spot was available.

With both of our children in care together we were paying \$1,700 a month. That was \$200 more than our mortgage payment. Even with two good careers it was a stretch for our family. Several years we had to dip into our retirement savings to cover the burden of those expenses. I remember many discussions at the time about how we would afford college for our kids and then laughing that we were already paying the cost of college for them to go to day care. Ironically, our son is now at Lane Community College and our monthly cost for him to go to school and live two hours away is \$1,500. I recognize we are extremely fortunate. So many families do not have that kind of resource we had to afford quality care for their kiddos. I know many families must settle for the places that we could just drive past and that breaks my heart. Our kiddos and our families deserve better! They deserve to have access to have quality, affordable care. I spent almost ten years working at United Way of Lane County. One of the impact areas we invested the most energy and resource into was early learning and specifically access to quality, affordable care for children under the age of five. We had access to the best researchers at the University of Oregon, EC Cares and to experts working on the issue across the United States to inform the importance of this area of focus and support the long-term impact on our families, on our economy and the health of our communities. At one point, we brought in an expert from the Federal Reserve who shared that they had run the numbers and investing in quality day care was the best investment a community could make. For every \$1 invested in early childhood development and quality day care the return on that investment would be \$17 dollars. Kids who get that leg up early on go on to graduate from high school, go onto further education, earn higher wages over their lifetime and stay out of the criminal justice system at significantly higher rates. I know you have all seen the research and heard from the experts. I am just a Mom who was lucky enough to provide my kiddos with the best possible start in life because I was privileged enough to have the necessary resources. With 17% (or more in many areas) of Oregonians living at or below the federal poverty line, too many of our families don't have access I had. The high cost to provide quality care by skilled and trained professionals prohibits even many of our families who live above that level of income to have access quality care. All parents, regardless of employment status or level of

income, deserve good, quality choices for the early education and care of their children. Parents should be able to both afford child care and should be able to choose the type of care and provider that works best for their child and family. Thank you for listening to my story and for working to make life better for our kiddos and their families.

With gratitude,

Doris Towery
Mom of Two & Executive Director for The Willamette Valley Cancer Foundation
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