



Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and Nosse and Members of the Ways and Means Sub-committee on Human Services,

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents about 27,000 workers statewide. Included in that 27,000 are low-income working families in the service industry, behavioral health and care giving industries that may need assistance from the state through self-sufficiency programs. Some of these low wage workers are our licensed in-home child care providers, their employees and our members at three Head Starts in the state – programs who care for children whose families use child care subsidies provided through the state.

Unfortunately, for many working families, including those in early learning and child care, the income isn't enough to get by and they turn to the state for assistance for services ranging from child care subsidies through Employment Related Day Care, SNAP and health care benefits. As you have likely heard from others, only 11% of eligible families in Oregon receive child care assistance. While Employment Related Day Care currently has open enrollment, many families either don't know about the program or believe that it isn't open. Others have been accepted and either cannot find a child care provider that meets their needs or they cannot afford the co-pays for care - the highest in the nation.

Since capping the program in 2010, Employment Related Day Care has had a cycle of closed enrollment with reservation lists and opening once enrollment dropped. For many, providers, parents, case managers, this cycle created confusion about the availability of the program. Over the last year, Kim Fredlund and the self-sufficiency team at DHS have been doing their best to get the word out, that the program is open and all who struggle with child care costs should apply and let the agency determine who is eligible. It just takes time to get the word out. Continued funding is crucial to sustaining and building a program that keeps parents working and kids in safe, consistent, quality care.

Child care providers know the need is great for child care subsidies. Many charge the DHS rate (near 75th percentile of market rate) for their private pay families, because charging more isn't feasible for the families. While the state has made progress in raising the rates for across the stat – particularly in rural areas, the costs of providing quality care, with well compensated staff are far greater than most families can afford. Without funding for child care subsidies to keep rates competitive we keep the supply of child care availability low.

Hopefully, this will not be the last time you are discussing investments in child care subsidies this session. There are a number of bills targeting specific needs in the child care system to support children, families and providers. I ask that you to fund this program and support a system that helps children and families be successful in the world.

Respectfully submitted by Eva Rippeteau, political coordinator, AFSCME Council 75.