

To: House Economic Development Hearing  
From: Regan Gray, Family Forward Oregon  
Re: Child Care is Economic Infrastructure  
Date: May 15, 2019

Chair Lively, Members of the Committee:

My name is Regan Gray, I am the Child Care Policy Advisor of Family Forward Oregon. We are an organization focused on strengthening the economic security of mothers and caregivers.

In our work with mothers, families and caregivers over the years, reliable access to high-quality, affordable child care has emerged over and over as one of the most pressing issues facing families all over our state. Increasingly, we are also hearing employers express difficulty in recruiting and retaining workers due to the child care crisis.

Our state is simply failing to provide the kind of child care infrastructure that we need. Quality child care is too expensive for many families to afford and yet child care professionals are some of the lowest compensated workers in our state. Even when you can afford it, it's hard to find a child care provider with an opening.

Child care is a critical part of the state's infrastructure for existing businesses and for economic development. Just like with other state infrastructure — such as roads and bridges needed to move goods and get people back and forth from work — parents also need high-quality, affordable child care in order to productively participate in the workforce. However, less than 10% of Oregon families with at least one child under the age of six can afford infant care, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) affordable child care standard.

Although child care is expensive, child care providers are very underpaid. Our economy depends on child care labor to help raise the next generation, to ensure that parents can remain employed, and to support employers by ensuring their employees are able to work. The women doing this important child care work are under-compensated, earning some of the lowest wages in our state. They are stressed financially, and can't afford to stay in the field - especially if they have children themselves.

We have a task force bill in Ways and Means, which we believe is a critical next step in understanding where we are succeeding, where we are falling short - and what a blueprint for the child care system we need might be. Without a vision for where we're going, we cannot get there.

We hope today is the start of a deeper and longer-term conversation about the state's role in addressing this crisis.