

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Amber Oldridge, and I live in Grants Pass, Oregon; and I've owned and operated Home Away from Home Family Preschool And Childcare for the last two years.

I operate a 24 hours home daycare where I provide a safe and loving environment for children while their parents are at work. I also offer a preschool-based program for after-school, early morning, as well as overnight care. The parents that I provide care for at really early and late (i.e., Overnight) or for families that work in the medical and or single parents who work odd hours are tough to find childcare for.

As you are all aware, we are one year into a global pandemic. Frontline workers like myself are faced with additional challenges and risks we could have never anticipated. For instance, even though my husband has an enlarged heart, with a leaky valve, we made a choice knowing that if we chose to remain open and provide care for the community, there is a possibility that our family could catch covid, even if we wore masks, sanitized everything, and followed every covid rule in place, for working families. At the end of the year, three days before Christmas, we were informed that one of our parents who worked in the medical field had caught covid. So we had to close our business, and our entire family, from my one-year-old to my husband, was required to get covid testing. It was a terrifying time for my family and the other families that had to lose work until our covid results came back as negative. So, us closing our business meant that parents were out of work for a little over a week; some parents were understanding and were worried for our family. Still, other parents were rude and wanted a refund for the days that care was not given due to us closing for a possible covid outbreak. Other sacrifices that my family has taken are that we are required to wear a mask in our own Home while daycare children are present. Again, the children that I provide care for during nonnormal hours, meaning other childcare centers and or programs are closed, except I chose to keep my hours open, with the understanding that parents might lose their jobs. Being that I typically have children 17 hours a day, my family, meaning my husband and my teenagers, are required to wear masks in their own Home unless they choose to isolate themselves in their rooms. I, who have no choice to isolate myself in my own room, wear a mask for 17 hours a day, for seven days a week. I have watched my now two-year-old vocabulary digress due to the fact that I am constantly wearing a mask. My family and I, in order to follow the state licensing covid rules and standards in order to operate a licensed childcare facility, wake up early and stay up late to make sure that we are properly sanitizing every toy, furniture, and etc daily. We have sanitized and disinfected our toys and furniture so much that our toys are breaking and that our furniture's finishing (i.e. protective coat) is wearing off. I have depleted my personal savings account when the pandemic first hit, and stores were running out of food, cleaning supplies, and rolls of toilet and tissue paper. My cleaning supplies, due to the inflation cost in cleaning supplies, and regular household items such as tissue papers and etc, my monthly cleaning supplies budget has either doubled or tripled, depending on where I am to buy such items. My husband has recently been laid off, because of the amount of times/days that he has had to take off because of the number that my staff member has had to take off work in order to follow the covid standards, even though her child or herself may have had just a common cold. So, now my family has gone from 2 incomes to 1 income. The grants that were given in 2020, have been a big help and a blessing, but what would not only help us to get us throughout the pandemic, but what would help us centers both public and private beyond this pandemic is fair pay. Fair pay and for state payments for DHS, to be contracted slots and not simply based off of the hours that we provide care for. As of right now, if I have a DHS client that is contracted with me to be a full-time child,

And if the parents to stay home to take care of their sick child or to take care of themselves because they are not feeling well, depending on the hours and or minutes, reflects how much DHS is willing to pay. Often times if a family member is short, by a certain number of hours, my family ends up paying the cost that was not paid by the state. Yes, I can go after the parent to pay for the difference, but that would mean that there would be a good possibility that a) I will not receive the payment, then at b) a bill of theirs would not be paid, be it a light bill, water bill, etc. So, often times I will ask the parent if they are able to pay the difference, and I will explain to them the conditions of the state, but often times my family is to eat of the cost what the other [parents are not able to afford. Minimum wage is expected to go up to \$15 and hours, and that is for basic, non-education required type jobs, childcare not only requires an educational background in the field, but it also requires ongoing educational training. Yet, depending on what type of business license you have, with early-childhood education department, the state of Oregon pays different rates whether it be for an RF, CF, and a center based. For an RF license the most that you can make for a preschool, full-time child is \$550, the most that a state is willing to pay for a CF within the same circumstances is \$650, and for center based is \$800. In a ballpark a child care provider is making as low as \$3.44 to \$5 an hour, when providing care for a child on an average of 40 hours a week. These rates make it really hard to not only support our families, but also as well as to provide good pay for an employee. I personally pay my staff member \$17 an hour, because what we do is not easy- not everybody has the patience and or the ability to work with a large group of children for 9 hours or more a day, it takes skill and love to work with children to go far in this field. On top of being educated and willing to continue on your education in the early childhood development field. Paying my staff member \$17 an hour was a financial hardship on my family, but it was worth every penny, sadly other teachers are paid less, due to the unfair rates of childcare. One last thing, if the state could offer, affordable healthcare insurance for both the childcare providers and their family,

[Tell a brief story about how it has been harder for you during pandemic – both for you and your family and more specifically, how it has impacted the work you do.]

This is where the American Rescue Plan comes in. Oregon is set to receive a lot of federal money over the next few years – money that many of us desperately need. Instead of saving this money for a future rainy day, the state should make every effort to help rebuild the economy by spending this money now.

One way to rebuild with this money is to prioritize essential workers – workers that are often the least well compensated. Direct payments to this sector of Oregon's workforce would roll right back into the economy.

I ask that you prioritize not just home Away from Home Family Preschool and Childcare, but other frontline privately owned childcare providers. By doing this, you will show support for the many workers that have helped Oregon get through this pandemic.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your commitment to our state's frontline workers.