

April 26th, 2021

To: House Committee on Rules
From: Ryan Tobias
Re: Support for child care, HB 3073

Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I appreciate your time and attention to this important issue.

When my wife and I decided we wanted to have a child, we had no idea the role childcare would play in determining our future. When my wife was 6-months pregnant with our daughter, she casually began researching childcare availability and cost in the Portland area. She called me a few minutes later, in tears.

The cost for full-time care was more than either of us had ever imagined. The monthly cost would be more than our mortgage payment, and nearly as much as my wife was making in her full-time role as an office manager. And the lack of availability was alarming – to secure a spot at a local childcare center we would need to wait anywhere between 3 and 6 months. Meaning we had very little time to figure out how we were going to pay for it. If we were both going to continue working full-time after she gave birth, we needed to figure something out, and fast.

Since then, all of our professional decisions have been determined by how any changes would impact our ability to pay for childcare. My wife, who had some experience working in childcare to pay for college, considered opening a small center in our basement. Instead, I was lucky enough to quickly find a job that came with a generous childcare benefit. Now I love my job but, even if I didn't, I would be locked in to my current position until my daughter is able to transition to the public school system. Even with my generous childcare benefit, my wife – who has an advanced degree and would love to transition into teaching – is also locked into her position, as even a temporary, transitional reduction in our income would make affording full-time care impossible. And should either of us lose a job, we wouldn't be able to keep our daughter in care. And, without care, it would be a tremendous challenge to start a new, full-time position for that parent. Prior to having our first child, we were considering having 2 – 3 in total. With the cost of childcare, however, that possibility is out of reach.

But, in many ways, our family is 'lucky' in these matters. I think of my sister-in-law, who has a son near the age of my daughter. Shortly after the birth of her son, her relationship with the father turned toxic. He became emotionally and physically abusive. As she made plans to exit that relationship and move out of the apartment they shared, it became apparent that she wouldn't have any way to provide care for her son while keeping her job. As the manager of a franchise location for a national fast food chain, she works more than 40 hours a week, and needs someone to look after her son in order

to leave her partner. She makes too much money to qualify for the ERDC, but not enough to pay for care on her own. Just like us, she's stuck, but in a significantly more precarious position that we are.

While the proposed bill won't help my sister-in-law, and it won't help my family, it will bring the stability that all families require to those in even more precarious positions. Currently, childcare centers are reluctant to enroll ERDC families, as income and job status requirements make it difficult for families to stay in the program. The income limits on the program discourage parents from pursuing better paying positions, and can even disincentivize marriage for single parents. And if a family member loses a job, they might lose access to ERDC altogether, making securing another position next to impossible.

All of these problems might make a little more sense if childcare were a lucrative career. But – in spite of the high costs of care for families – childcare providers are barely making ends meet, themselves. The system as operating is barely functional for any participant, at any level, and yet remains outrageously expensive for all.

House Bill 3073 won't fix all of these problems in one fall swoop. But by streamlining the system and providing more stability in funding for both families and care providers, they will begin to address the significant gaps in our care system. Capping co-pays will help low income families make ends meet. Program flexibility will allow service workers – a huge percentage of our workforce – to secure childcare when they need it, when they are working. And protecting eligibility will give families time to deal with major life-changes – job losses, transitions, and promotions – while giving childcare centers additional incentives to enroll ERDC families. These bills before your committee today won't fix Oregon's childcare problems, but they are a good starting point – demonstrating this body's commitment to addressing these issues, while shoring up the state's current programs. For these reasons I ask that the Committee prioritize childcare funding and support the passage of House Bill 3073. Thank you for your time today.

Ryan Tobias