

OREGON AFSCME COUNCIL 75



5/17/21

Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood,

Thank you for hearing our testimony. My name is Aimee Olin, and I am the Staff Representative of AFSCME Child Care Providers Together. We represent licensed in-home family child care (FCC) providers, small family programs that have 10-16 children in care. There are currently approximately just over 2000 licensed in home programs open and providing emergency child care around the state. Family child care homes are open before child care centers and schools open and after they are closed and are therefore crucial programs to meet the current needs of working families. Our smaller family programs provide high quality individualized care that can often not be accomplished in larger centers and school-based settings.

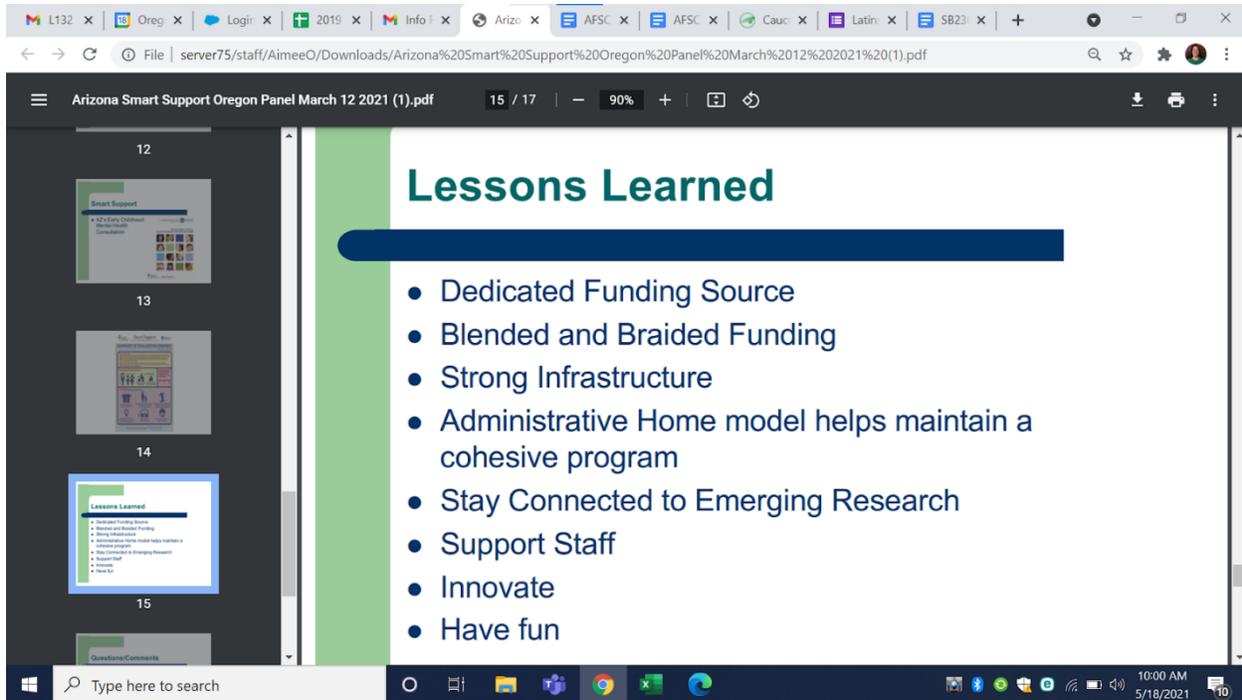
Our programs are needed to keep the lights on for so many low-income families and to meet the diverse needs of children in our communities. Over 75% of our programs actively provide care to families who qualify for ERDC the state's child care subsidy program which is 60% of state subsidy slots over every provider type including centers and license exempt care. (Draft CCDF State Plan on the Early Learning Division's (ELD) website) Limiting our programs' ability provide care for subsidy eligible children could create a disastrous plummet in availability for care for low income working families to a system that is already struggling to meet the needs and accessibility to all of Oregon's working families.

We know the ELD has collected some initial data showing that children of color are being disproportionately impacted by suspension and expulsion; we need to change this and want to be partners in correcting this injustice. The ELD and the Office of Child Care should mandate required annual implicit bias training, just like all licensed in-home providers and their staff need to renew their CPR and First Aid training annually, so should they too have to participate in an annual implicit bias and anti-racism trainings.

We also believe that every child deserves to have everything they need to be successful in the early learning or early care setting their family chooses, and every child care provider deserves the adequate supports, resources and tools to work together to ensure that every child can be successful.

We call on you to ensure all children and families and the child care providers who serve them have the adequate resources and supports for every child to be as successful as possible in the program their family chooses.

Please ensure there is a family engagement piece at the core of this program. We have participated in the two webinars hosted by the ELD that brought panelists from Arizona, Arkansas, Navajo indigenous first nations and New York to share their models for mental health services integrated within their states' early learning systems. Every panelist outlined that their states' programs had parents, families, and children at the core of their program design and dedicated significant initial and ongoing investment. The last slide of Arizona's presentation emphasized:



Panelists from these projects all talked about growing the workforce; the need to identify culturally specific mental health specialists for every community and to develop parent advocate specialists as well. Right now, Oregon does not even have enough child care providers, or child care workers let alone mental health specialists. We do have opportunities to grow and develop our workforce and we have a lot of providers in our union who have their Oregon Infant Mental Health accreditation (ORIMHA). We even established a scholarship program for providers to access to get this mental health training and certification.

We are just at the beginning of developing Oregon's model and language — it could hinder our child care programs' ability to provide care if we do not first invest the appropriate resources to make the model successful. The consequences of moving forward without adequate resources could be catastrophic for the families and children this bill intends to help.

Let us first have the opportunity to take inventory to identify what systems are in place, what is working, what needs to be improved, what people, resources, connections and supports need to be improved or created. Let this process take place with both families and providers, of all provider settings and types. We need everyone at the table to identify their own needs and develop a plan that works for them.

We fear if a study, workgroup or taskforce is not first established and used to identify all our needs first, in order to develop a comprehensive and fully resourced system that will meet the needs of all children in all settings, and the current language is rushed through there will be unintended consequences that will push many of our high quality programs out of existence and create a larger issue with the gap of supply, services and access for families.

Our state needs to acknowledge that families face many barriers to accessing the full comprehensive services our children, families and providers deserve. We can do it, but the first step should be the state taking very desperately needed action to first identify how we can improve our systems in place, what assets we have and how we can develop all the people, resources, supports, infrastructure and systems needed to support all of us — children, families and providers. We need to develop culturally specific wrap around support services for all of our children, to be delivered in the classroom and in all the ways families choose and deem that they need.

We've heard \$5.8 million has been proposed to fund early learning mental health support for a warmline for providers and parents who can call to connect to specialists, who will deliver coaching and some support services in the field. However, we know \$5.8 million is a good start, but does not cut it. Other states that have mental health and early intervention support services in place spend a minimum of \$50 million per year to ensure the program has the ability to serve all children's needs to the level each child needs and deserves. We're concerned that four years is not enough time to get the proper funding in place.

We know we can develop a wonderful program in Oregon that lifts all boats and makes readily successful all the resources, tools, supports and investment needed to ensure all of our children have access to the quality program of their choice. However, the means to fully address this complex issue is not to overburden an already overburdened workforce who are predominantly women of color.

We first need: comprehensive and fully funded support systems in place, reporting timelines about service levels that are tied to budget timelines, so policy makers have an opportunity to allocate resources to close gaps, and clearly stated exceptions for alleviating immediate safety concerns, something every state that has developed a program has.

Finally, re-consider the current language in the bill that will create more access issues for families to access child care when programs are disallowed to receive subsidy – we need to reduce barriers for families. Do not prop up punitive measures that will only squeeze out programs further, diminishing our limited supply of early learning and care settings statewide.

We are in full support of preventing suspension and expulsion in early learning and early care. Please support all families by helping us to use this opportunity to create a workgroup that identifies all stakeholders that need to be at the table, that properly engages families of color, indigenous families, undocumented and mixed status families, families with children with disabilities, families with children with special needs, families whose children need trauma informed care –ensure first, a workgroup that properly engages all of these important stakeholders. We want every stakeholder to be given the opportunity to be at the table in a real way, to identify the services *we* need and to allow families to identify the services they need and that *they* want and that adequately engages all child care and early learning providers from every provider type, using the data and presentations from other states who have implemented and have fully funded a comprehensive plan that meets all needs, first.

Thank you,

Aimee Olin

Staff Representative

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