



Service Employees International Union – Oregon State Council
6401 SE Foster ▪ Portland, OR 97206

February 12, 2021

Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2503. My name is Alberto Gallegos and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Oregon State Council. SEIU Oregon is composed of SEIU Local 503 and SEIU Local 49, which together represent over 85,000 people. Local 49 represents private sector janitors, property service workers, light manufacturing, and healthcare workers; while Local 503 represents homecare workers, private nonprofit workers, in-home child care providers, nursing home workers, and state and local government employees.

This policy is one of our legislative priorities this year as part of the Fair Shot For All Legislative Agenda.

I am writing in support of House Bill 2503 because the child care crisis that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic is now a state of emergency for parents, providers, and kids across Oregon. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services benchmark that child care affordability is seven percent of income¹. At that standard, families need an income over \$200,000 annually to afford full-time care for one infant in Oregon. A minimum-wage worker in rural Oregon would need to work full time for nearly 34 weeks, or from January to August, just to pay for child care for one infant.

Child care is primarily funded by families that cannot afford the true costs associated with care for children. While parents are unable to afford care, child care providers are not charging enough to cover the costs to provide care, often subsidizing a lack of public investment in the system with their low wages. The current funding structure is unsustainable and as a result, every county in Oregon is a child care desert for at least one age group of children².

Despite how prohibitively expensive child care is for parents, child care providers (who are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and women of color) are among the lowest-paid workers in Oregon. In 2018, the median wage of preschool teachers, many of whom are college-educated, was \$13.95 an hour, and was \$11.86 for child care workers in Oregon. Average annual wages in child care are about half the all-industry Oregon average.³ This year has made even clearer how essential child care is—it is essential work that makes all other work possible—and yet, we don't compensate providers accordingly.

¹ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/demystifying-child-care-affordability/>

² <https://health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/early-learners/pdf/oregon-child-care-deserts-01-29-2019.pdf>

³ <https://familyforwardoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FFO-Child-Care-Report-2019-REV.pdf>

Child care workers are paid so poorly that 53% of them nationally rely on one or more public benefits, whether Food Stamps, Medicaid, EITC, or TANF.⁴

Child care is necessary for joyful children, thriving families, and a strong economy. Every Oregon family deserves access to high quality, affordable, and culturally relevant child care, and every child care provider should be paid a wage that reflects the essential work they do. We can take the first steps to get there with House Bill 2503. Please stand in unity with our members by supporting this bill.

Thank you,

Alberto Gallegos
Political and Government Relations Organizer
SEIU, Oregon State Council

⁴ <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index/>