

February 15th, 2021

To: The House Early Childhood Committee
From: Laura Kirk,
Re: Support of HB 2503 and HB 3073

Dear Chair Rep. Power and Vice-Chairs Rep. Reynolds & Rep. Zika,

My name is Laura Kirk and I live in Milwaukie, OR. Finding childcare was a challenge before this pandemic. The most popular and reputable childcare options filled up quickly; spots are more difficult to find the younger your children are or how nontraditional your work schedule is. Now, on top of the previous barriers, parents are now having to take into consideration the risk level of COVID when hiring a provider while also balancing an affordable childcare budget.

I've been VERY fortunate to continue working from home since the beginning of March 2020 while simultaneously managing my 2nd grader's day of online courses and preschooler's daily needs. I am not bored. The money I am saving by not paying for childcare right now is offset by my inability to work the other two part-time side gigs I had to make ends meet. But this is not sustainable, and I am not confident in sending my children back under the current circumstances and fear for the upcoming day I won't have a choice.

It is not the childcare providers I am weary of. They are still tirelessly caring for children on a wage that doesn't even support their own families. A wage they are using to also purchase the supplies (and PPE) now necessary while operating at (necessarily) lower capacities. **It is the lack of support that has been given to them to care for our children that I am weary of.** These essential workers should have access to free healthcare and sick pay, be given a healthy stipend for their supplies and PPE, and paid more for their time.

The childcare system wasn't working before and it is time to think differently about how we fund and prioritize it. There was a need for smaller groups and more one on one attention before the pandemic, and an even bigger need for it now! The weak points in the system have only been amplified: Oregon's child care deserts, racial inequalities, and mental welfare.

This isn't just about our children. Women accounted for 100% of the jobs shed by the U.S. economy in December. All of those women now have to restart their careers in the midst of COVID while also struggling to find quality, affordable childcare.

The way we handle budgeting for the care of our children will affect us (and our kids) forever. Our school aged children that are now home add an additional consideration both in terms of capacity and (emotional and intellectual) support. Parents need the peace of mind that their providers have enough funding and resources to be safe, and providers need a clear plan AND FUNDING NOW MORE THAN EVER. Please pass HB2503 & HB3073 to take a small step in securing the funding our child care system needs.

Sincerely,
Laura Kirk