



February 22, 2021

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

On behalf of NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, we respectfully request the committee's support for House Bills 2503 and 3073. This legislation will provide for the health and livelihood of all Oregonians, and most importantly, centers families most impacted by the current pandemic and economic downturn.

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon is dedicated to building and sustaining a movement that uses the political process to guarantee every individual the right to make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive choices, including preventing unintended pregnancy, raising healthy families, and choosing legal abortion.

Nationally, 7-in-10 people believe that individuals should be able to decide if, when and how to raise a family of their choosing. Importantly, the reproductive justice framework recognizes that for many families experiencing economic hardship, that "choice" isn't real if the cost of reproductive health services or the cost of raising a family (costing an average of \$13,000 per child per year) is out of reach. As a generation, millennials are waiting longer to start families and having fewer children than any previous generation;¹ notably, two-in-three millennials name "a lack of economic resources" as the main reason for making this decision to delay having children.²

One of the most underfunded and expensive costs of raising a family is child care. Oregon's child care crisis existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but has now reached a state of emergency. Due to the pandemic, over 50% of Oregon's pre-COVID child care slots are gone, and 40% of providers are closed, unlikely to ever reopen.³

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services benchmark that child care affordability is equivalent to seven percent (7%) of family income.⁴ 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 34 weeks, or from January to August, to pay for child care for one infant. The current structure is unsustainable and as a result, all 36 counties in Oregon are considered a child care desert for at least one age group.⁵

Despite how prohibitively expensive child care is for parents, child care providers (a workforce disproportionately consisting of 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.⁶ Nationally, childcare workers are paid so poorly that 53% of them must rely on one or more public benefits, including Food Stamps, Medicaid, EITC, and/or TANF.⁷

¹ Pew Research Center, May 2020, "As Millennials Near 40, They're Approaching Family Life Differently Than Previous Generations"

² <https://modernfertility.com/modern-state-fertility-2020-sofi-career-money>

³ <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregons-childcare-system-faces-uncertain-future/>

⁴ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/demystifying-child-care-affordability/>

⁵ <https://health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/early-learners/pdf/oregon-child-care-deserts-01-29-2019.pdf>

⁶ <https://familyforwardoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FFO-Child-Care-Report-2019-REV.pdf>

⁷ <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index/>



Hardest hit by this pandemic are the 350,000 Oregonians (17% of the labor force) who work in essential occupations that do not allow them to work from home.⁸ Of the options that parents might have, not all of them meet their families' unique needs—like irregular work schedules or language spoken—and parents across the state often find themselves patching together care just so they can get to work.

In December 2020, all jobs lost in the United States were women's jobs, with women losing 156,000 jobs and men gaining 16,000. COVID-related job losses hit Black and Latinx women hardest: **between January and December 2020, nearly 2.1 million women left the labor force, including 564,000 Black women and 317,000 Latinas.**⁹ About 2 in 5 unemployed women had been out of work for 6 months or longer, including about 41% of Black women, 38% of Latinas, and 44% of Asian women. If we don't act now, we are facing decades of setbacks for women's economic security, with the largest burden placed on women who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or other people of color (BIPOC)¹⁰.

COVID-19 has laid bare the insufficiencies of our current child care system. It will take a long-term, sustained effort to rebuild a child care system that truly works for all our families. In the meantime, we can start with House Bills 3073 and 2503, which will:

- Streamline governance by housing our state's child care subsidy program, Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), with other early learning and child care programs. This realignment will allow for a more seamless coordination and coverage of services between ERDC and other programs like Preschool Promise and Early Head Start. It also allows the state to be strategic about purchasing child care to rebuild the sector after devastating losses during the pandemic.
- Reform ERDC into a child care assistance program that better serves low-income and BIPOC families, as well as providing fair compensation for the child care business owners and educators—predominantly women and BIPOC women—who perform this critical work.

In addition, NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon would also like to see amendments or future legislation to ensure that Oregon's child care programs are able to support all children in our state. Currently, programs utilizing the federally funded Child Care and Development Block Grant are restricted, and only available to parents of children with a social security number or who can provide documentation of their legal immigration status. Like with the Reproductive Health Equity Act (2017), Oregon has a precedent of developing policy and utilizing state General Funds so that complementary state-administered programs are available for families who would otherwise qualify for health and human services, if not for federal immigration restrictions. The legislature should take similar steps to promote new child care services that are truly available and accessible to all.

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 Bills 2503 and 3073. NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon urges your support for these important bills.

Sincerely,

Christel Allen

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<https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2020/08/27/covid-challenges-working-oregon-parents-graphic-of-the-week/>

⁹ <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/December-Jobs-Day.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/December-Jobs-Day.pdf>



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