



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

February 24, 2021

The following testimony has been translated from Spanish:

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2503. My name is Esther Juarez and I am a member of SEIU Local 503. I live in Beaverton and have been a childcare provider for over 20 years. I am currently providing childcare for my daughter's 4 children. Their ages range from 11 months to 13 years; I also have a 14 year old son at home.

During my 20 years as a childcare provider, I have had the joy of nurturing and spending quality time with children; and I have had the privilege of seeing them grow up. In those same 20 years, however, I have also witnessed and experienced firsthand the failings of our childcare system. Our system is broken, and it has been broken for quite some time. It has failed countless childcare providers, parents, and (worst of all) children.

To make matters worse, we are now in a global pandemic that exacerbated the precarious situation that childcare providers and their clients are in. In March 2020, my daughter had to leave her job due to her pregnancy. Her plan was to give birth to her beautiful daughter, recover, and then go back to work. Unfortunately, her plan was derailed due to an unforeseen pandemic that she had no control over. She has struggled to find a job which means that she no longer has access to childcare. So, for the last 11 months of this quarantine, I have continued to provide childcare with no payment.

I know that if I ask, my daughter will do her best to pay me. But how can I ask her to do that when I know how much she is struggling financially? I know I am not alone in this. Many childcare providers forgo the parents' copay because they know that they cannot afford it. In order to provide for my family and my grandchildren, I took up a second job selling tamales. This is nothing new to me. Due to my low salary, I have been selling tamales on the weekends well before the start of the pandemic.

A low salary is not the only issue when it comes to payment. Navigating the payment system is a daunting task, which has to be done every month. In order to receive payment for our work, childcare providers and clients need to submit their pay documents via mail or fax to the agency, so that the case manager can approve it. Unfortunately, any tiny mistake on either of our parts is grounds for denial. If I make a mistake on a date or forget to sign my name on one of the numerous pages, then I won't get paid until I correct it. It would seem fair, if not for the fact that by the time the documents are mailed back to me, I correct them, mail them

back, and they are approved, the payment deadline for that month has passed; which means I have to wait another month before getting paid.

Due to minor errors, lack of support from the agency, and documents being lost in the mail as they were sent to and fro, I worked from August 2019 to January 2020 without pay. When I finally received payment in January, it was only for the last 3 months since the agency could only do 3 months of retroactive payments. As a low-wage worker, I believe this is not only unfair and unjust, but cruel. I deserve to be paid for every hour that I have worked.

I have been underpaid and undervalued for far too long and in too many instances by our broken system. I have seen families struggle due to lack of childcare; especially families of mixed-status who have access to childcare for one of their children, but not the other. I have seen parents in my community flinch in fear at the mere mention of DHS; an agency that was created to support them and their loved ones. Things need to change. Our system needs to change. Although there is no quick fix to these problems, I believe that HB 2503 is a step in the right direction. As a childcare provider and as a mother, I ask that you please support this bill.

Thank you,

Esther Juarez
Childcare Provider
SEIU Local 503