



Testimony in Support of HB 4005
Ames Kessler
February 1, 2022

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 4005. My name is Ames Kessler and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO). Hunger-Free Oregon is a statewide anti-poverty advocacy organization with a small staff of under 15 members. We understand that leadership comes from those with lived experience and that hunger and poverty do not exist on their own, but rather a result of overlapping systems of oppression that create layers of privilege and inequity. Our values and work are centered in creating systemic changes to end hunger.

We are writing to offer support for House Bill 4005 because we know that access to child care is necessary for joyful children, thriving families, and a strong economy. The pandemic has made clear that without care work, no other work can happen. Child care provides the necessary infrastructure for Oregon's essential workforce to continue to work, and we have seen the devastating impact on employment when parents could not find child care, especially for mothers.

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 children¹.

Additionally, 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.²

In 2021, the legislature passed HB 3073 which responded to the state's child care crisis and provided immediate and long-term relief to Oregon families most in need of child care by establishing the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) as an independent agency, consolidating child care and early learning administration, and by making needed reforms to the state's child care subsidy program: Employment Related Day Care (ERDC).

¹<https://health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/early-learners/pdf/oregon-child-care-deserts-01-29-2019.pdf>

²<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index/>

These were essential first steps to streamline our state's administration, but more is needed to ensure we have a child care workforce that can meet the needs of Oregon's families during and beyond the pandemic. Child care providers need additional support that rectifies the decades of financial scarcity they have experienced and that actually invests in building more child care supply, in compensating our providers and educators better, and that grows the capacity of the new Department of Early Learning and Care. HB 4005 will:

- Support providers and child care affordability for subsidy-eligible families by increasing subsidy rates to the 90th percentile of the 2020 child care market rate.
- Support Oregon's child care systems development through HB 3073 Implementation with increased capacity to stand up the new Department of Early Learning and Care.
- Delay fire code requirements on in-home child care providers to prioritize building new provider capacity while still keeping kids safe.

Additionally, we support increasing child care slots through investing in new provider grants, strengthening our state's Child Care Resource & Referral Centers, and direct relief payments to the child care workforce. Without investing in new providers and helping existing providers expand, we are unable to meet current demands and will be even further behind when implementing new state, and likely federal, expanded eligibility to child care subsidies.

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. PHFO urges your support for HB 4005.

Sincerely,

Ames Kessler
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon