



Testimony in Support of HB 4005

Teresa Aasness

February 2, 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 Teresa Aasness and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Families First Parent Resource Center. We are a private nonprofit that provides parent education and support in Grant and Harney Counties. The lack of childcare in our frontier region causes extensive issues for families, business and the community at large.

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.
- 81% of rural communities in Oregon are designated as child care deserts--meaning *at most* those counties only have available slots for a third of the children who live there.²
- Parents are scrambling to find reliable child care options as they continue to work either from home or in their workplaces. Hardest hit are the 350,000 Oregonians (17% of the labor force) who do not work in occupations that allow them to work from home.³ 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.

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

² <https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Supply-and-Demand-Study-1oct20.pdf>

³ <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2020/08/27/covid-challenges-working-oregon-parents-graphic-of-the-wee/>

The inadequate supply of consistent childcare in our region is causing a loss of families that are willing or able to live here and raise their children here. Young professional families come to our area because they want the lifestyle that a frontier region provides. Unfortunately, as they start having children it becomes apparent that they cannot continue to live here and maintain employment due to the constant interruption that the lack of child care presents. This not only affects families but also employers that are unable to recruit new families to the community who have the required education and training for their positions.

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).

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. (org name) urges your support for HB 4005.

Sincerely,



Teresa Aasness
Families First Parent Resource Center