

Submitter: Megan McMillan
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood
Measure: HB4005

February 2, 2022

To: House Committee on Early Childhood
From: Megan McMillan, Washington County
Re: Child Care and HB 4005
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Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and Members of the Committee:

Last spring I appeared before our State Legislature to testify on behalf of expanding and improving the Employment-Related Day Care program. At the time, the childcare industry and the day-to-day experience of the parents relying on that industry was in full-blown crisis. More than 500 childcare facilities had closed over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating a situation where the entire state of Oregon was already declared a child care desert with only enough care for 1 in 3 babies.

I'm afraid to say things have only gotten worse. The numbers collected in the U.S. Census Pulse Survey for ??December 29, 2021 – January 10, 2022 are staggering:

-2.5 million adults took unpaid leave to care for a child under 5 who couldn't attend daycare

-3 million adults used sick time or PTO and another 3 million adults cut work hours to care for a child who didn't have care

-A half a million adults lost a job and another 1.2 million adults didn't look for a job to care for a child who didn't have care

-And another 2.6 million adults supervised a child under 5 while working

While this spike is undoubtedly related, at least in part, to the Omicron variant ripping through our communities at this time, the stories behind the statistics are not temporary. As a single mom of two kids 5 and under in Washington County here in Oregon, I can affirm that access to affordable and stable childcare remains my number one stressor. For kids with special needs like my older son—stability comes in the way of a teacher a child trusts who is trained to support their needs. For parents like me who need to work, stability simply means knowing you won't wake up to a message that your daycare has closed due to lack of staff or lack of ability to stay afloat. Unfortunately with the average childcare wage at \$12.24 an hour, I can't blame teachers for quitting and I can't blame providers for shutting their doors. Something has to change, because if childcare crumbles then our ability to work, and

our ability to function as a society crumbles too.

Thankfully we've got an option to pull forward meaningful change, and as a parent in crisis I would like to implore you to support this session's child care legislation. The package will:

- Include a rate increase for providers caring for kids on the ERDC subsidy program—this is a must have from a socioeconomic equity perspective
- Establish a capacity building grant program that will recruit, train, and support new providers coming online and help current providers expand
- Direct payments of \$500 to child care workers to recruit and/or retain the child care workforce
- Make additional investments to support the creation of the new Department of Early Learning & Care and continued implementation of child care gains from last session. Let's not squander the investment we've already made. Let's do it right!

Available, affordable, and excellent childcare is not just a basic need for me as a single working mom, but a game changer for my son with special needs. Any break in the continuity of care sets him back in his development.

I live in constant fear of losing childcare, and sadly I share that experience with just about every Oregon parent I know right now. This is why I think our state needs to invest in this package, in child care providers. Not just to better support and keep current providers open, but to start to bring more providers online and increase access to child care across the state.

Thank you for your time and for being a supporter of parents and children in our state by championing improvements to childcare.