

Submitter: Allison Morton
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood
Measure: HB4005

February 2, 2022

To: House Committee on Early Childhood
From: Allison Morton, Portland
Re: Child Care and HB 4005
Email: allison@smallwondersschool.org

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

My name is Allison Morton and I work in Portland Oregon. This summer I will recognize my 10th year as a childcare provider in NE Portland. My program, Small Wonders School, has grown in this time from serving 8 children that first fall to serving just over 200 children between my two center settings.

It is oversimplified in headlines that the childcare system is struggling both as a consequence of its long-standing under-supported nature and the ceaseless immediate challenges. This Wednesday for the first time in 10 years, I, with minimal notice, told my clients we would be unable to provide service the remaining two days of this week. This comes from a staffing shortage compounded by teacher no-notice absences, no notice quitting, two weeks notice, sick days, and quarantines. Yesterday in an admin zoom we were left to recognize the harsh truth that we would have to cull enrollment and release clients. It is a forced move made to aggressively and preemptively preserve our staffing structure and remaining enrollment. The calls, both in closure and in regards to enrollment, were a necessity that extended beyond the ratio coverage logistics--in simple truth, myself and my admin team could not stop crying. We are trapped in a cycle of one step forward 7 crashes back--as time accumulates, a reasonable expectation would be you would become seasoned to the uncertainty, but the challenges are unrelenting. Timely repairs from the landlord, disgruntled ex-employees, a stream of ghosted interviews, clients releasing the own stressors of their life via harsh emails, the trying task of maintaining administration duties large and small with the substitute coverage of at least 3 teacher absences. That is 3 absences per 1 admin of which I have three.

We have always paid at a higher scale than the market rate, and to maintain this position this year is to repeatedly incur a jump in staffing costs. Wages are a key element, but to work in childcare at this time has to be a very intentional act when there are numerous opportunities paying a comparable or more aggressive pay rate for a job that does not involve such a high rate of emotional investment. Early

learning and child care are often interchangeable terms and to me this highlights the key importance of providers--they are there for your child both as a teacher and a caregiver. Their doubled efforts and investment must be matched by the community at large.

As for our past two days? The mental duress prevented us from another moment of adaptability--our burnout could ultimately impact the careers of 400 working parents. I was asked recently why I still do this, continue to show up to a job impacting my mental and physical health--I do not have a whimsical endearing answer any longer, I do it out of necessity. The business, the loans, they are tied into my house. How can I afford my children any opportunities if it is all locked into this? I do remember 8 really really good years, and I do steal away in a classroom of my own to stay as close to my children but the toll is heavy. We are in a position better than that of other providers--colleagues had to make the call to terminate clients care much earlier than our and there are those calling clients on a daily basis letting them know if they will have enough staff or not to serve them that day. I do not work in pure isolation like some providers do, but have a steady team that is weathering this with me. Programs should not be working on an island, and they cannot, if we want the field to be sustained and to ultimately meet the lofty goals held by many for the future of early learning.

I urge you to pass HB 4005. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Allison Morton