

Testimony in Support of HB 4005  
February 2, 2022

Dear Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and members of the House Committee on Early Childhood:

My name is Vanessa Brown, and I own and operate Little Swans Child Care in Klamath Falls. My program is licensed for 16 children. I specialize in caring for children with developmental delays, specifically speech delays, sensory processing, and Autism. I am also a special needs mom. Our program focuses heavily on meeting children where they are and helping them excel and grow.

I became a child care provider because it has been my lifelong dream. Remember in Kindergarten or even preschool when you were asked what you wanted to be when you grow up? Well, I wanted to be a teacher, lawyer, and mom. In a way a child care provider is ALL those things plus so much more. I am living my dream. However, if there are not major changes in Oregon, my dream could become a nightmare.

I was born and raised in Klamath Falls by a single mother. I grew up in a child care program that was right around the corner from my house. I remember how much Lois cared for and loved all of us children. Her home was my home. My mom was also a child care provider for a few years as I was growing up. Having child care in our home when I was a preteen really solidified my dream to be a child care provider and be home with my children.

My husband and I run our program together; we have 3 children of our own. In our program, most of our families qualify for ODHS Child Care Subsidy (9 out of 10), and 9 out of 11 children qualify for services with Early Childhood Intervention or Special Education in their Elementary School. All our families are working lower- to middle-class families. Our program operates from 7:00am – 5:30pm Monday through Friday; however, we have taken children as early as 5am and had children as late as 8:00pm.

All of Oregon is in a child care crisis, it is even more evident in the rural areas. Infant and toddler spots are the most sought-after spots. I get two to three inquiries daily for a child under the age of two years old needing care. We are now seeing what happens to Oregon's workforce when parents are left without child care options that suit their needs. We are also seeing what happens to Oregon's economy when parents are forced to stay home because there isn't a spot for their children in child care.

Not only has child care in Oregon been dwindling in the last five to ten years, but since the start of the pandemic, we have been working under exhausting conditions and ever-changing regulations, with very little support to keep us afloat. We are losing providers more than ever before. We value our careers and we value the families we serve, but we do not feel valued by our state — we are

being overworked and underpaid and we are desperate for the financial support and respect needed to stay in the jobs that we love, serving our communities.

With pandemic-related expenses, increased inflation and increased employment-related costs, child care providers in Oregon are struggling more than ever to financially maintain their businesses, while not inflicting increased financial burden on the families we serve. Many in-home providers are not evening making Oregon's average minimum wage after all the business expenses are being covered.

In-home providers like me represent approximately one quarter of all child care in Oregon. We represent an even higher percentage of care in rural areas, 24/7 care, and care for non-English speaking families. Despite the growing need for around-the-lock and culturally-relevant care, Oregon has failed to recognize the significant community benefits that family-based, in-home child care programs provide. We all want children to have high-quality and affordable care. The drive for quality is too often associated with high-priced child care centers that do not serve Oregon's working families. These working families need affordable and accessible child care and providers who treat their children like family. The stability, support and relationships I build with my children and families provides real value and represents true quality.

After the 2022 session, I ask the Oregon Legislature to work with the Early Learning Department to stress the value of family-based care in meeting Oregon's child care demands. We are small businesses, which are usually run by women. We are proud of our businesses and we want what is best for our children. However, we struggle with constant agency rule-making that equates expensive and unrealistic requirements with quality care. The ever-changing guidance during the pandemic was especially burdensome on top of the struggle to meet the child care needs of Oregon's essential workers. It is important that in-home child care in Oregon is valued and recognized as valuable and worth the effort to keep around.

I support the \$100 million dollar child care investment package and HB 4005, because it will give providers like me the additional financial support we need to continue to operate and serve Oregon's working families. The families I serve in Klamath Falls aren't looking for fancy toddler snacks or expensive enrichment activities. They simply need the safe, affordable, and flexible care I provide. They want their children in a family based setting so they can continue to thrive and grow. I want to continue my dream and be there for them.

Thank you so much for listening to what child care means to me and what child care in Oregon needs to survive.

Thank you,

Vanessa Brown