

Submitter: Toni Naranjo-Rivera

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

Measure: SB1591

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson, and members of the committee, My name is Toni Naranjo-Rivera. I am an expecting mother on the north Oregon coast. My husband and I are so excited to be welcoming our daughter into the world in March.

While we are preparing for our baby's arrival next month, we are already worried about the day we will both need to return to work. My husband's work schedule overlaps with my own by a few hours every day. We will need to find a child care provider for our daughter for those overlapping hours, and there are zero available options where we live.

Being a new parent is challenging enough on its own without the added stress of needing to find child care in order to work, and not having any available options. We live in an area considered to be a child care desert, where we are only meeting about one third of the community's need for child care. Our local preschools that care for 3-5 year old children all have 2 or 3 year wait lists because the demand is so high. There are no options for children under the age of 3. Families like mine are desperate for solutions.

For years I have watched family members and friends struggle to find available child care options in our area. My sister-in-law is a single mom of a beautiful 11-month-old boy. Every week she has to patch together child care for her son based on her changing work schedule in the service industry. Most of the time multiple family members rotate child care shifts according to our schedules that week to care for her son. Thankfully, we have family members with flexible enough schedules to try to make it work on any given day, but there have been days when my sister-in-law has to tell her employer that she won't be able to work due to lack of child care.

Personally, I feel fortunate enough to work for an organization that would potentially allow me to shift a day in order to care for my child, without fear of being left jobless. However, that is not sustainable for my family or my employer. Not every parent has that security, including my husband with his job.

My family's experience is the same as countless others in our area. This issue affects not only families, but child care providers as well. My good friend was a child care provider in Nehalem for years, but she and her team were only able to care for a designated amount of children due to state regulations. Anything we can do to remove barriers for our providers to give care is absolutely necessary.

We need tangible solutions to the many issues that parents and child care providers face. SB 1591 is an immediate step toward addressing this crisis we are facing. This bill would make child care more accessible by increasing available slots, while maintaining existing safety rules around provider: child ratios. I believe it is important to remove restrictions at a time when childcare needs are at an all time high, not only in my community but across the state. Expanded child care infrastructure is urgently needed. Our state must commit to invest in immediate and long term child care solutions for providers, parents and our future generations.

Please vote yes on SB 1591. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Toni Naranjo-Rivera