



Date: February 20, 2023  
To: House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services  
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland  
Re: Support for Invest in Early Childhood and Child Care - Equity in Early Childhood Workforce Development, HB 2991

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 2991. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance's 2020 report, "Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States," states "the number of family child care homes has decreased nationally, and recent studies describe the reasons these homes close. However, the reasons for the falling numbers are not the same in all communities. Therefore, it is important for your state, territory, and tribe to study its conditions to identify the most common reasons for the declining numbers of family child care homes."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, they break down "4 major factors for why family child care providers are leaving the field: compensation and benefits, business operations, demographic factors, and new requirements and regulations."<sup>2</sup> "Providers may leave the workforce to seek higher pay or benefits because being a provider can have low or unpredictable income and no benefits. For business operations, providers left family child care due to family child care providers' lack of business expertise; rising costs; local challenges like zoning restrictions or high fees for licensing, technology challenges; declining enrollment, increased competition, and availability of other options for families. For demographic factors, providers left the family child care workforce because of the demands of the job including long hours, physical requirements, and work/family balance; providers retiring and not being replaced; and lack of respect. Providers also left family child care due to new or increased requirements and regulations, which include difficulties navigating multiple and changing requirements like background checks; quality improvement systems and to access public funding/subsidy reimbursements providers had to participate in these systems; and access advancement opportunities like state quality improvement initiatives."<sup>3</sup> Nationally, the child care workforce has suffered, and many states including Oregon have had issues with child care supply.

The Oregon Early Learning Division published the "Oregon's Child Care Desert 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots" report which states "all Oregon counties are child care deserts for infants and toddlers and 25 of the 36 counties are deserts for preschool-age children. Per the report, a child care desert is defined as a community with more than 3 children for every regulated child care slot, meaning there are more children needing care than there are spots unavailable."<sup>4</sup> Communities do not have enough child care providers that can be accessed when needed. "Recent research revealed clear disparities in how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted child care for

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<sup>1</sup> National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States, 2020, pg. 8.

<sup>2</sup> National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States, 2020, pg. 8-10.

<sup>3</sup> National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States, 2020, pg. 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> Oregon Early Learning Division, Oregon's Child Care Desert 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots, 2021, pg. 7.



Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families in Oregon.”<sup>5</sup> Before the COVID-19 pandemic, child care needs were not being met, especially for Black families; as the U.S. labor market continues its recovery from the “depths of the pandemic-induced recession, the child care workforce stands out in stark contrast, struggling to regain significant pandemic-related job losses.”<sup>6</sup> “More than 2 years after the start of the pandemic, the child care workforce, mostly employing women and disproportionately, women of color, continues to operate below pre-pandemic levels. This not only harms the sector but also precludes workers with caregiving responsibilities, primarily mothers, from fully participating in the labor force.”<sup>7</sup> Not only do we need to ensure that we are investing in an equitable workforce, but the wages also those workers receive must be sustainable. To not do both will only exacerbate the workforce drain we’ve seen as well as impact workers and families across all sectors who make their way back to work.

With Oregon being a child care desert, there is a concern about how many providers of color are in the child care workforce. Culture-specific child care providers are essential to the community, as they provide representation in a space that is heavily relational and can provide care that has cultural traditions and values naturally built in. The Black community is often culturally misunderstood, and their needs are overlooked. In the “State of Black Oregon” report by the Urban League of Portland, it is stated that “Black women find good business opportunities being child care providers and with them in the workforce, child care is more culturally responsive to the needs of Black children.”<sup>8</sup> We know that having people that look like us, providing culturally-specific services and care to us, can give us ease of mind. With HB 2991, we can find out how many providers of color are in the child care workforce and if the factors for providers leaving the child care workforce found in the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance’s 2020 report apply to Oregon. HB 2991 directs the Department of Early Learning and Care to commission an independent study regarding barriers to attaining a high-quality early childhood workforce. This will be crucial to collecting up-to-date data on the child care workforce and what is needed to support growth and retention in this workforce, which ultimately supports Oregon families and the economy. If we do nothing, the available workforce will continue to shrink, child care deserts will persist, and working families will struggle to find affordable care for their children.

Please pass HB 2991 to study how we can make the child care provider profession accessible and increase the child care provider inventory that Oregon desperately needs. Our families, children, and economy are depending on your support, especially Black families who experience disparities when looking for child care.

Respectfully,

Stephanie Phillips Bridges  
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<sup>5</sup> Oregon Early Learning Division, Oregon’s Child Care Desert 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots, 2021, pg. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Center for American Progress, The Child Care Sector Will Continue to Struggle Hiring Staff Unless it Creates Good Jobs, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Center for American Progress, The Child Care Sector Will Continue to Struggle Hiring Staff Unless it Creates Good Jobs, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Urban League of Portland, State of Black Oregon, 2015, pg. 116.