

Submitter: Lydia Gray-Holifield

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education

Measure: HB5013

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and members of the committee,

My name is Lydia, I live in Portland and I have raised 17 children here. I have always been a working mother and it has always felt impossible.

I used to be a preschool worker too. I loved my job and cherished the time I got to spend nurturing young children and helping them adjust to being in a classroom. But as the mother of a toddler myself, I was struggling. The preschool that I worked at was too expensive to enroll my own daughter in. Childcare costs in general were just too expensive and my wages were too low to afford a quality program. I was in a position where I had to patch together sub-quality care and then eventually, I was out of options. I had to tell my boss that I needed to bring my daughter to work or I was going to have to quit.

It is never OK for a mother to have to choose between rent and childcare, but that is the reality for so many of us. There are kids who simply cannot get access to preschool or who are pulled out because it's so expensive. How can we say that a particular child doesn't deserve quality care that is joyful and educational simply because their parents, grandparents, or legal guardian doesn't make enough money? That is a lose-lose situation for everyone.

In addition to the financial struggle of providing childcare, I've experienced the system failing to provide supportive care to my daughter who has disabilities. She is 14 now and has been diagnosed with ADHD, defiant disorder, and a sensory disorder, but when she was young she had not yet been diagnosed and she was struggling. She was thought of as a problem child because she couldn't sit still or focus in class. She was sent home several times which meant that I had to leave work. What are parents supposed to do when their kids are forced to go home halfway through the day or not allowed to attend a full week?

We can build a new child care system that works for everyone involved—parents, providers, and our kids—if our state lawmakers take bold action and make bold investments. I urge you to invest as much as possible in child care and early learning. It is so important for parents, child care providers, workers, and most importantly our kids.

Sincerely,

Lydia Gray-Holifield