

April 8, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means
From: Kelly Mehigan, Portland Oregon
Re: Child Care Funding

Co-Chairs Senator Steiner and Rep Sanchez, Members of the Committee:

My name is Kelly Mehigan and I am an expecting mother in Portland Oregon, I am writing to you to urge you to prioritize and invest funding in childcare for Oregon. Even though my child is not yet born, we are actively looking for childcare now because Portland is a childcare desert. From very early in my pregnancy we have been told in the Portland area that there is a lack of available childcare. I've been told specifically by providers that there is a lack of infant care and that care will be hard to find and we might not make it off a waitlist. So we've begun our search early and while we are on two waitlists, that does not guarantee us a spot. The cost of childcare, the lack of available providers with quality care, and the inaccessibility of the current child care infrastructure, which makes it harder for providers to create available space, has been a stressor during a time that should be joyful and exciting.

During our search for childcare and touring spaces, we have also been met with the realities of poorly funded infrastructure for childcare spaces and providers. Things like whether a space has access to the outdoors, space for children to roam and play freely have not always been present in centers we have toured. There's also the issue of safety during the pandemic with proper ventilation and safety measures. Costs which providers are responsible for covering and ensuring are up to CDC standards for operating. I recognize the emotional, and physical toll this takes not only on the children accessing these centers but also on the providers and teachers in them. These inequities could be alleviated by a properly funded and supported infrastructure system for childcare providers.

A substantial barrier that we are experiencing is finding childcare that we can afford, even in a household with two working parents the cost of childcare centers we've toured has rivaled that of living expenses. We've seen the cost of childcare nearly at a 1:1 ratio of rent prices in our city and most families simply cannot afford to pay that much in childcare. While I know that there are programs and resources for low income families, access and support to these systems need to be expanded exponentially. For families who do not qualify for those services, we are in a position of trying to balance the burden of finding safe, quality childcare and what we can reasonably afford. If you are not a wealthy family this feels like an insurmountable task.

I work as a child and family therapist, I work with older children and what I have seen is a fundamental lack of after school care for children in the school age range. Parents can't work, because they have to be available to take care of the children once the school day ends. The lack of financial security in families because of a lack of childcare is a systemic problem that can be solved by prioritizing childcare in the upcoming budget.

Childcare is a fundamental right and basic need. It supports all other work, we can show up to our jobs and perform well knowing our children are looked after in safe, quality care. Without it families are stuck, careers stunted, children missing out on opportunities to connect, grow and learn with their peers. I urge you to prioritize funding for childcare, it's an investment in securing families financially and socially. As I continue my search for childcare, I hope that with proper attention and support from you, I will be able to find it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kelly Mehigan