

Submitter: Rebecca Ellis
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

May 3rd, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means
From: Rebecca Ellis, Deschutes County
Re: Child Care Funding

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

My name is Rebecca Ellis and I live in Bend, Oregon

I am a childcare provider and parent of three children, and writing to urge you to prioritize funding for childcare in the state budget. The childcare crisis existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and is still a state of emergency for parents, providers and kids across Oregon.

In Central Oregon, the childcare landscape has been described as a “child care desert” for years now – there simply are not enough slots to go around. When parents don’t have access to consistent and affordable childcare, they are limited in their ability to provide financially for their families, forcing many of them into poverty or to leave their children in unsafe situations with family members, friends, or unlicensed daycare providers while they try to work.

When families are stretched thin and trying to manage the high cost of living while unable to bring in enough income due to lack of accessible childcare, and thus, inability to work, parents are not able to offer their children the stable, consistent and loving home life children need in order to thrive, develop appropriately and be set up for success during their school years and beyond. Childcare, however, is not just a problem for parents – it affects us all.

Business owners suffer when parents are not able to stay in the workforce or have to call out because of unreliable childcare. Our communities aren’t as strong when children aren’t given a strong start at the beginning of their life – these are the people who will one day be adults, contributing to their communities and stepping into leadership roles. We know having a solid foundation during these pivotal, early years of development for children is crucial for their long-term success in life.

The truth is: it is expensive to provide childcare. It is even more expensive to provide high-quality childcare that pays teachers a living wage as early learning

professionals, which we need to begin to see as a necessary service to our communities and society. As a provider who has been working an uphill battle to compensate for the lack of funding available for childcare in our state, creating a care model where tuition is offset through fundraising, parent participation and local partnerships, I have watched firsthand as lives are changed. Families who weren't sure if they could stay living in the area or thought they might lose their house have had their situation dramatically shift for the better, simply due to access to affordable childcare.

Especially since the pandemic, we are seeing an increase in challenging behaviors in young children we are not equipped to respond to for a myriad of reasons. We need to be able to pay and retain qualified staff. We need costly barriers removed so more providers can open centers and expand childcare slots. We need the cost of childcare to be affordable for working families. We need wider access to ERDC and state subsidies for working families. We need funding for childcare now more than ever and I am urging you to prioritize it in the state budget. The budget reflects our values. Investment in childcare connects two related values: a strong economy and socially secure families. It lays a strong foundation for the care economy that we all need.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Ellis