

Submitter: Heather DeSart
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce
Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3011

Legislative Testimony on the Childcare Crisis in Support of HB3011

Good morning, Chair Hudson, vice chairs Fragala and Harbick, and members of the committee,

My name is Heather DeSart, and I am the Executive Director of Northwest Oregon Works, the Local Workforce Development Board serving Benton and Lincoln Counties. I am writing today to address a critical issue that is impacting our communities, our workforce, and our economy—the childcare crisis.

The childcare crisis in Oregon is not just a challenge for parents and caregivers; it is a significant barrier to workforce participation and economic stability. Without affordable, reliable childcare options, parents and caregivers are unable to fully participate in the workforce, creating financial instability for families and reducing the number of skilled workers available to fill open jobs. This burden is felt especially hard by single, working mothers and women of color, exacerbating pay disparities and limiting opportunities for advancement.

Employers across the state are struggling to find qualified talent, and the lack of childcare options is a major contributing factor. Small and locally owned businesses are particularly vulnerable, as they are less able to absorb the impact of workforce shortages. This not only affects their ability to grow but also threatens their very survival.

The childcare crisis also has long-term implications for our children and youth. Without stable, caring adults in their lives, children are more likely to experience barriers in their growth and development. This is especially true for those from undervalued communities, who are already facing multiple challenges.

At Northwest Oregon Works, we are committed to addressing this crisis through innovative solutions and partnerships. We have been working with local community colleges, early childhood education providers, and other stakeholders to develop training programs and support for entry-level workers in the childcare industry. However, these efforts alone are not enough.

We need comprehensive policy solutions that address the root causes of the childcare crisis. This includes increased funding for childcare subsidies, support for childcare providers, and investments in early childhood education. We also need to explore innovative solutions, such as employer-supported childcare programs and public-private partnerships, to expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare.

At Northwest Oregon Works, we recognize the importance of investing in the education and training of our future childcare providers. To address the childcare crisis effectively, we propose increased funding for Early Childhood Education (ECE) degree programs. This funding will support students pursuing careers in early childhood education, ensuring that we have a well-trained and qualified workforce to meet the growing demand for childcare services.

Additionally, we advocate for funding to invest in the operation of campus centers. These centers play a crucial role in providing accessible and affordable childcare options for students, faculty, and staff. By investing in the operation of campus centers, we can support working parents and caregivers, enabling them to pursue their education and careers without the burden of finding reliable childcare.

In conclusion, the childcare crisis is a multifaceted issue that requires a coordinated and comprehensive response. I urge you to prioritize this issue and work with us to develop and implement solutions that will benefit our families, our workforce, and our economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather DeSart,
Executive Director