

Submitter: Laura Labarre

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1507

My name is Laura Labarre, and I am a parent and a former early childhood policy professional.

Oregon families and child care providers are sounding the alarm: our state's Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program is on the brink of collapse. With a projected \$88 million shortfall and the program at risk of shutting down by January 2027 without intervention, the consequences will be catastrophic — not just for working parents, but for our entire economy.

I'm writing to urge lawmakers to use reserve funds to backfill the \$88 million deficit for the Employment Related Day Care Program.

If the ERDC program runs out of funding, the consequences will be immediate and severe: parents will be forced to make impossible choices—such as cutting back on essentials or pulling their children out of care altogether. Childcare providers, many of whom operate on thin margins, will face closures or reduced capacity as families can no longer afford their services. This isn't just a budget line—it's a crisis in the making, one that hits working families hardest and threatens the backbone of our local economy. Child care is integral to our infrastructure and a necessary public investment; it's time we treated it like one.

I support ERDC because I am a parent to two children who spent years in early learning settings including one child who is still in preschool. I also worked many years in the early learning and health policy and programming space. Personally, though I did not use ERDC, I know it has kept our beloved preschool open. Without ERDC, there are several families who core members of our community who could not enroll their children at our preschool. I feel confident saying our preschool would potentially have been forced to close without the slots families pay for with ERDC, which would have severe, negative impacts for all the families at our school regardless of how they pay for their child's slot.

As a professional in the space for many years, I have personally seen the systemic benefits of ERDC. Oregon's already flailing economy would be decimated if working parents could no longer afford childcare. Imagine the loss to the workforce and to the stability of our communities if so many parents dropped out of the workforce. I have seen also what a difference it makes in the lives of the children, especially when they can use ERDC slots to be in culturally responsive and affirming high quality early learning settings. There are academic and behavioral gains seen for years to come in the quantitative and qualitative data. Most importantly, it is just common sense. As someone who lived many years in two "peer countries" that had free and widely available early care and education, it remains shocking to me that Oregon is still debating the worth of access to childcare and early learning. In comparable places, it is a "given." Let's support ERDC and make it a given in Oregon.

It's pouring in Oregon. I urge you to use revenue and reserves to close the \$88 million shortfall for the ERDC program in the Department of Early Learning and Care budget.

Thank you,
Laura Labarre