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Khanh Pham



Pham, Valderrama and Alonso Leon: Child care is unrecognized backbone of our economy

State Rep. Khanh Pham represents House District 46 in Southeast Portland. Rep. Andrea Valderrama represents House District 47 in East Multnomah County. Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon represents House District 22 in Woodburn and Marion County.

We are moms, mother figures, caregivers, providers and lawmakers. We have each experienced Oregon's child care crisis firsthand. We have all struggled to find culturally appropriate, safe, reliable and affordable care in our communities and as a result, have taken on the additional responsibilities of child care while attempting to balance other responsibilities.

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COVID-19 has made everyone aware of what we have known for a long time: our child care system in Oregon doesn't work. This crisis calls for us to redefine how we care for our communities and our kids — during COVID-19 and beyond.

Black, Indigenous, and/or women of color are the backbone of the early childhood workforce, making up the vast majority of caregivers who are doing the work that makes all other work possible for parents. But caregivers are significantly underpaid. In 2018, the median wage of preschool teachers, many of whom are college-educated, was \$13.95 an hour, and was \$11.86 for child care workers in Oregon.

The lack of public investment in a comprehensive child care system is a systemic problem rooted in racism, sexism, and the country's history and present of exploiting our care labor. This, of course, has been aggravated by COVID-19, as BIPOC women continue to be the most impacted by unemployment rates, job and wage losses this past year, furthering long-term economic impacts on women and mothers. Following our most recent revenue forecast, it is clear much more must be done to ensure a more equitable recovery by investing in our BIPOC and low-income communities.

What we've also known just as long is that caregivers and parents who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color, as well as low-income and rural families, are even more child care-burdened and least served when it comes to child care policy, facing increased economic barriers to affordable, accessible, and culturally-responsive care.

Our frontline workers and care providers are essential workers in our economy. Child care makes all other work possible. Without immediate investment in child care infrastructure, this crisis will have a profound economic impact on those who are already financially vulnerable: our child care workforce and low-income and families of color, across the state in both rural and urban communities, who struggle to access the quality care they need, and mental health of mothers bearing the brunt of this additional care on top of other responsibilities.

How do we start to build toward the universal, culturally responsive, quality and affordable child care system we need? We start with House Bill 3073 being considered by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Ways and Means. This bill will make major improvements for Oregon's public child care system, the Employment Related Day Care program, and streamline child care and early

learning programs administration in a new division to ensure greater access and stability. HB 3073 is our first step toward building a better system.

We also know that this legislation makes sense from an economic perspective, as working parents account for 31% of our labor force. If a third of our state can't consistently and reliably show up to work, we're in hot water. In fact, due to employee child care issues, businesses nationally lose \$3 billion in revenue annually according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Families across the state deserve quality and affordable child care that meets the needs of every child and caregiver. We can have a care infrastructure that works for all of us—from babies to elders. But we must start where the system is most broken: child care access for Black, indigenous and people of color parents and families, and better compensation and benefits for child care providers.

We urge support for HB 3073.