

My name is Megan McMillan and I live in eastern Washington County. I am a mother to a 22 month old son and a 4 1/2 year old son who has special needs.

I rarely log into Facebook these days, but yesterday I had a few minutes free so I decided to check the latest chatter in a mom's group that's given me lots of support over the past four years. We share our ups, our downs, our tips for finding childcare and used rain pants, and everything in between. That's why--even though it didn't happen to me, personally--I was dismayed to log in and find a familiar thread I've seen so many times before:

"Anyone have any preschool recommendations out there? My son's daycare just announced they are closing. We are devastated!"

With the following reply:

"Oh no, not another one in SW Portland. So many have closed already!"

This particular mama and her partner are both teachers, with a 2 year old and another baby on the way. Without childcare, they can't work. But in the past year, this story has repeated itself over and over again. In Washington County and on the west side of Portland we've seen centers that served hundreds of families close this year. The Opal School, the on campus daycare at Nike, and countless in-home and family daycares have shuttered their doors as the already razor-thin margins became unsustainable due to the burdens and instability of COVID. Oregon was already a childcare desert and this past year has made a bad situation even worse.

Although this Facebook post wasn't mine, I go to sleep every night knowing my son's school could be next and I'll have to begin the daunting search. Every time I've had to search for care it's like a full time job on top of my already full time job. Finding care meant late nights researching a dizzying array of semi-accurate lists maintained by the counties, Facebook groups, and websites to find what my options were and whether they had openings, and how much they cost. Securing care meant time away from work to make phone calls, answer emails, and fill out forms. I had the luxury of flexibility and have always been able to make it work, but if I were like so many mothers who are working multiple jobs at odd hours to pay for basic needs, or if I could not find culturally competent care, or I was encountering a language or immigration status barrier, this would be an impossible burden.

I'll note that available, affordable, and excellent childcare is not just a basic need for me, but a game changer for my son with special needs. Any break in the continuity of care sets him back in his development. We witnessed the consequences of this when his school closed during the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis for a few months. The loss of a care setting and routine is extremely disruptive for a kid like my son, and for so many other children who are atypical. But with how unsustainable it is for childcare providers to operate, and with how unaffordable care can be for parents, this dilemma looms for me and so many others.

I'll add that the cost of monthly childcare for two kids under five for me is 150% of what I pay for my mortgage. As in, I pay almost double my mortgage to have care for my kids each month, so I can work and continue to pay that mortgage. It's an endless cycle I feel trapped in. Somehow the cost is outrageous but my son's preschool teachers still make barely more than minimum wage.

We must do better. We can do better! Please do everything in your power to make childcare more affordable for families, more sustainable for providers, and more accessible and available for every Oregonian. Please fully fund HB 3073 to rebuild our childcare infrastructure--the work that makes all other work possible.