

February 15th, 2021

To: The House Early Childhood Committee
From: Megan McMillan
Re: Support of HB 2503 and HB 3073

Dear Chair Karin Power and Vice-Chairs Lisa Reynolds & Jack Zika,

My name is Megan McMillan and I live in eastern Washington County. I am a mother to a 20 month old son and a 4 1/2 year old son who has special needs. The past year has been filled with uncertainty in ways I could have never imagined, but no uncertainty was more troubling than whether I would have access to childcare both during and after the COVID-19 crisis. After enduring attempts to work at home full time while also teaching and caring for two very young children due to COVID-19, I can say with absolute certainty that childcare is the work that makes my work possible!

Right now I'm one of the lucky ones. I am currently employed and I have childcare for both of my children that allows me to *stay* employed! For me--and so many other working families--access to childcare is a basic need. But in the childcare desert of the state of Oregon, 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 gamechanger 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 for 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, I'm sure many are faced with this dilemma and lose critical support.

For context, 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. Imagine the exhausted mother, lying awake at night worried about finding, keeping, or affording childcare as you make your decisions on HB 2503 and HC 3073. Does ERDC in its current form serve her? Does the availability and affordability of childcare in Oregon meet her needs? If you make her life easier, not harder, with every decision you make, you're doing the right thing. Thank you for paying attention to this critical issue and helping to meet our basic needs.