



February 22, 2021

Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bills 2503 and 3073. My name is Nancy Haque and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Basic Rights Oregon. We are the state's LGBTQ advocacy organization, working towards equality for all Oregonians.

We are writing to offer support for House Bills 2503 and 3073 because the child care crisis that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic is now a state of emergency for parents, providers, and kids across Oregon. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services benchmark that child care affordability is seven percent of income¹. At that standard, families need an income over \$200,000 annually to afford full-time care for one infant in Oregon. A minimum-wage worker in rural Oregon would need to work full time for nearly 34 weeks, or from January to August, just to pay for child care for one infant.

As a parent of a young child myself, I have felt the stress and uncertainty of trying to find reliable child care as I continue to work from home. Hardest hit are the 350,000 Oregonians (17% of the labor force) who do not work in occupations that allow them to work from home.² Of the options that parents might have, not all of them meet their families' unique needs—like irregular work schedules, language spoken, or needing an affirming caregiver for an LGBTQ child—and parents across the state often find themselves patching together care just so they can get to work.

And even though child care can be prohibitively expensive for parents, child care providers (who are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and women of color) are among the lowest-paid workers in Oregon. 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. Average annual wages in child care are about half the all-industry Oregon average.³

COVID-19 has laid bare the insufficiencies of our current child care system. It will take a long-term, sustained effort to rebuild a child care system that truly works for all our families. In the meantime, we can start with House Bills 3073 and 2503, which will:

- Streamline governance by housing our state's child care subsidy program, Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), with other early learning and child care programs. This realignment will allow for a more seamless coordination and coverage of services between ERDC and other programs like Preschool Promise and Early Head Start. It also allows the state to be strategic about purchasing child care to rebuild the sector after devastating losses during the pandemic.

¹ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/demystifying-child-care-affordability/>

² <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2020/08/27/covid-challenges-working-oregon-parents-graphic-of-the-week/>

³ <https://familyforwardoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FFO-Child-Care-Report-2019-REV.pdf>

- Reform ERDC into a child care assistance program that better serves low-income, BIPOC, and LGBTQ families, as well as providing fair compensation for the child care business owners and educators—predominantly BIPOC women—who perform this critical work.

Child care is necessary for joyful children, thriving families, and a strong economy. Every Oregon family deserves access to high quality, affordable, and culturally relevant child care, and every child care provider should be paid a wage that reflects the essential work they do. We can take the first steps to get there with House Bills 2503 and 3073. Basic Rights Oregon urges your support for these important bills.

Sincerely,

Nancy Haque
Basic Rights Oregon