

February 15th, 2021

To: The House Early Childhood Committee
From: Lydia Gray-Holifield
Re: Support of HB 2503 and HB 3073

Dear Chair Karin Power and Vice-Chairs Lisa Renyolds & Jack Zika, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lydia, I live in Portland and I have raised 17 children here. I have always been a working mother and it has always felt impossible.

I used to be a preschool worker too. I loved my job and cherished the time I got to spend nurturing young children and helping them adjust to being in a classroom. But as the mother of a toddler myself, I was struggling. The preschool that I worked at was too expensive to enroll my own daughter in. Childcare costs in general were just too expensive and my wages were too low to afford a quality program. I was in a position where I had to patch together sub-quality care and then eventually, I was out of options. I had to tell my boss that I needed to bring my daughter to work or I was going to have to quit.

It is never OK for a mother to have to choose between rent and childcare, but that is the reality for so many of us. There are kids who simply cannot get access to preschool or who are pulled out because it's so expensive. How can we say that a particular child doesn't deserve quality care that is joyful and educational simply because their parents, grandparents, or legal guardian doesn't make enough money? That is a lose-lose situation for everyone.

In addition to the financial struggle of providing childcare, I've experienced the system failing to provide supportive care to my daughter who has disabilities. She is 12 now and has been diagnosed with ADHD, defiant disorder, and a sensory disorder, but when she was young she had not yet been diagnosed and she was struggling. She was thought of as a problem child because she couldn't sit still or focus in class. She was sent home several times which meant that I had to leave work. What are parents supposed to do when their kids are forced to go home halfway through the day or not allowed to attend a full week?

No 3 or 4 year old child should ever be suspended. It traumatizes the child and says they are not worthy of learning. I don't blame the teachers who are simply not given the tools to help these children. I blame the system for failing these children. This system, that continually devalues child care work, results in providers that are overworked, underpaid, and find it difficult to access resources that could help better care for kids with disabilities or from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

This is a huge failure that the market alone can't fix, we need the state to intervene with an actual plan to address child care because there are too many parents like myself who have struggled. Struggled to find a provider when there are not enough slots, struggled to afford a quality provider, and struggled to ensure that their child was receiving care that was responsive to their needs.

Our most vulnerable families and providers need the immediate relief that HB 2503 can provide. Our state needs a coordinated center of operations for things like preschool and child care so we can continue addressing this crisis in the long term. HB 3073 can give us that. These bills won't fix the full problem, but they will set us on a different path that works better for parents, providers, and most importantly our kids. Please support HB 3073 and HB 2503.