February 15th, 2021

To: The House Early Childhood Committee
From: Gaby DonnellLCSW
Re: Support of HB 2503 and HB 3073

Dear Chair Rep. Power and Vice-Chairs Rep. Renyolds & Rep. Zika,

My name is Gaby Donnell and I live in Portland. I have worked as a mental health clinician in our community since 1986 and I specialize in providing care to parents of infants and young children.

Through my multifaceted work, I have gained tremendous clarity about the conditions that are required for workers and families to thrive in a society, such as living wages, stable work, high quality affordable childcare, and safety for themselves and their children. As a clinician, I witness pervasive stress associated with inflexible work schedules, low wages, and inaccessible (non-existent or unaffordable) childcare. Additionally, the COVID-19 global pandemic has exacerbated existing stratifications throughout society, predominantly impacting women who are most negatively impacted by the economic downturn as both workers and parents. Having worked at DHS for many years, there is no doubt so that many stressors that contribute to abuse can be helped with economic stability.

Importantly, much of the depression and anxiety I address in my practice is triggered or exacerbated by the unreasonable demands placed on workers and parents to solve problems that are vastly out of their scope to solve as individuals. Of course, this impacts women most of all, whose paid labor tends to be poorly compensated and unpredictable and is coupled with primary caregiving responsibilities at home. Sadly, depression and anxiety are unsurprising outcomes of the insurmountable stress of living in under-resourced communities with few social safety nets.

Thus, I am writing this letter to you today to emphasize the fact that social policy, like HB 2503 and HB 3073, is prevention. With these bills we have an opportunity to prevent emotional distress, improve mental health, and create more equitable communities where citizens can thrive.

Sincerely,

Gaby Donnell LCSW