



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Power
Vice-Chairs Reynolds and Zika
Members of the House Early Childhood Committee

FR: Jacob Finkelman, OR AFL-CIO

RE: HB 2503; HB 3073 Support

February 22, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. As members of the Fair Shot For All Coalition we support this policy as part of the 2021 legislative agenda to make sure Oregonians have access to dependable and affordable childcare, especially as we continue to weather COVID-19 and parents continue to experience precarious employment and options for safe childcare.

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 concluded that the benchmark for child care affordability is seven percent of a household's income. 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.

Despite how prohibitively expensive child care is 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. This year has made even clearer how essential child care is—it is essential work that makes all other work possible—and yet, we don't compensate providers accordingly.

Parents are scrambling to find reliable child care options as they continue to work either from home or in their workplaces. Hardest hit are the 350,000 Oregonians (17% of the labor force) -- many of whom are the hero essential workers who have kept our economy running -- who do not work in occupations that allow them to work from home. Of the options that parents might have, not all of them meet their families' unique needs—like irregular work schedules or language spoken—and parents across the state often find themselves patching together care just so they can get to work.

Working families need affordable childcare that allows them to provide for their family and know their children are being supported. Child care is fundamentally essential to our economy and if not addressed, will continue to disproportionately affect working people and their ability to provide for themselves, their family, and each other.

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. We urge your support for these important bills.