

Submitter: Verelle Tomford
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood
Measure: HB4005

February 2, 2022

To: House Committee on Early Childhood

From: Verelle Tomford, Portland OR

Re: Child Care and HB 4005

Email: verelle.tomford@gmail.com

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4005. My name is Verelle Tomford, I live in West Linn and I am a parent of Juniper and Reed, 6 and 3.

April 1, 2020 was the day that the pandemic became real to me. That's the day that I was informed by my son's wonderful, warm, in-home daycare that they would be closing permanently. They had been shut down for only 2 weeks, but already couldn't see their way through the coming weeks and months. I remember my stomach sinking and the room spinning when I learned this was happening, and in hindsight, I was justified in that feeling that nothing was ever going to be the same.

The months that followed meant patching together a part-time nanny and taking my own shifts watching my kids and a couple of others from my daughter's preschool, trying to create some sense of normalcy and stability for them, as it felt like my sense of normalcy and stability was crumbling. By the time we felt like it might be okay to send our kids back to preschool and daycare, there just wasn't a spot for them. We could wait months to get them back in, with a guarantee that both could go back at the same time, or be in the same classroom, or even the same provider.

Through word of mouth, we eventually found an in-home preschool willing to take both of my children, although it was only open 4 days a week, and we found ourselves once again scrambling to patchwork care for the 5th day.

Finding and maintaining quality childcare has long been a struggle for low-income families. But since 2020, it's become a major pain point for even middle-class families like my own. There simply aren't enough spots in care to meet the need.

My husband asked me a couple of days ago when I would be making the same income I did in 2019. While we try to approach our parenting in an egalitarian manner, the comment demonstrated how heavily the burden of the childcare hustle is falling on women. When the daycares close, it's most often the mother that fills the

childcare void. And it's most often the mother scrambling to find another spot, researching waitlist lengths, waitlist fees, enrolment fees, the provider's summer and holiday breaks, and the provider's reputation.

I've spent the last decade building my business, my reputation and trust with my clients. When I'm able to work, I find so much joy in what I do and I know that the state of Oregon benefits from the taxes I pay. But I can't count the number of times in the last 2 years that the struggle to find childcare has made me want to throw in the towel. To shut down my business and become a stay-at-home mom. I'm exhausted, and I don't feel like my government is doing enough to support working parents, especially moms. I know the childcare community doesn't feel supported either, and I can't blame them for closing up shop when they simply aren't paid enough to do this exhausting, but essential work.

Our state cannot afford to not invest in child care, especially in the midst of an ongoing pandemic. Providers should be properly compensated for their work, and families should have access to high-quality, affordable, and culturally relevant childcare. Please invest in child care and support HB 4005.

Sincerely,
Verelle Tomford