

## Testimony for HB 2504

Thank you, Chair Reynolds and committee for allowing me to submit my testimony in writing today. I am Kelly Sutherland, Executive Director of Relief Nursery in Eugene and Springfield, and I present this testimony on behalf of the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries. Our mission is to strengthen families and keep children safe. Our programs focus on child social and emotional development and parenting education and support. We have over 42 sites across the state serving approximately 2300 children and 1700 families annually. These are some of the most vulnerable children and families in our state.

The Oregon Registry Online (ORO) is the professional development system that certifies the qualifications of early childhood professionals within our Therapeutic Early Childhood Program and Outreach Programs, which provide therapeutic early childhood classrooms and respite care, respectively, for children. Many of our staff have received their training and education outside of the United States.

For these individuals, there are barriers within the ORO system that have resulted in the loss of qualified professionals at Relief Nurseries and other early childhood programs across the state. I am testifying in support of HB 2504 to direct the Oregon Center for Career Development (OCCD) to address barriers for this critical workforce.

My colleagues at Relief Nursery will today provide much more impactful and powerful testimony than me – speaking of their personal experiences and interactions with ORO.

As a leader in this field, I have witnessed many who have the advantage of being bilingual/bicultural being passed over for a position that they do indeed have the education and expertise for because they are not awarded a step level commensurate with their education and/or experience.

As the early childhood field works to become more equitable, this issue must be addressed, both for the sake of early childhood professionals and because having bilingual/bicultural educators means a higher quality experience for Spanish-speaking children and families.

The major issues are lack of consistency in awarding steps (or certification levels), it is expensive and time-consuming to have international degrees translated and approved by ORO, and there is a lack of technical assistance to navigate the online registry and scholarship applications.

The Oregon Registry Online is a project of the Oregon Center for Career Development and they are overseen by the Early Learning Division. Recently, progress has been made with launch of the Early Learning Degree Pathway Scholarship and Relief Nurseries have been offered continued opportunities to provide feedback on the barriers within the ORO system, for which we are appreciative.

Still, without human resources dedicated to providing technical assistance to those required to use the ORO system, any new effort will continue to be a challenge to navigate and barriers will remain.

While OARN is also in support of HB 3029 and HB 2991, which will provide a full study of the system, we hope you understand the urgency of addressing immediate changes.

As there is a critical childcare and early learning staffing shortage across the state, we can ill afford to wait, and ill afford to drive willing and quite capable candidates and staff away.

Thank you.