



March 20, 2023

Testimony in Support of House Bill 3027
Regan Gray, Child Care Policy Advisor for Family Forward Oregon
House Committee on Early Childhood & Human Services

Dear Chair Reynolds and Members of the Committee:

If you talk to any parent of small children, you will hear about the difficulty they experience accessing child care. It's hard to find. If you find it, it's unaffordable. Oregon has a handful of child care assistance programs to help families afford child care, but they are disconnected and difficult to navigate. The numbers don't lie. Oregon's largest child care subsidy program – Employment Related Day Care – has been unable to meet the caseload cap or process enough eligibility applications to implement a waitlist despite being funded to serve only 12% of the eligible population.

Far too many Oregon families that qualify for child care subsidies are unable to access it. Families are presented with a handful of programs offered through the state, and they need to navigate each different application process and eligibility criteria. Awareness of programs, confusing applications, slow eligibility determination processes and bureaucratic practices create barriers for Oregon families. ONE eligibility is taking longer to process ERDC child care applications than any other program applications they process. And other programs – like Preschool Promise – wait far too long getting income data from ONE to determine eligibility for their programs.

In 2021, the legislature passed HB 3073 to create the Department of Early Learning and Care and bring all child care programs together into one agency, with the goal of creating a "one-door" experience for families when needing access to child care. HB 3027-2 works towards that "one door" vision by creating a work group to bring relevant stakeholders together and propose a solution to quickly connect families with affordable care. HB 3027-2 will work through the legal and technological issues and report back to the legislature on how community-based child care navigators could be that "one-door" access. There are many issues to resolve on how these navigators can gain access to appropriate systems in order to guide families from finding out about

child care assistance programs, applying, getting through the eligibility process and finding a child care provider with an opening that takes the state subsidy.

The original bill proposed contracting for these child care navigators right away. What we have discovered is that more time is needed to work out the details. The -2 amendments change the bill into a workgroup that will bring stakeholders together with ODHS, ONE Eligibility, and DELC to tackle the hurdles that range from IT barriers, contracting limitations, and needed changes in OARs and ORSs.

Affordability of child care is a significant barrier for parents in need of care, and we have programs to help. But families are unable to get into those programs due to bureaucratic and IT barriers. Getting child care navigators into communities – navigators that have the capability to help with the full spectrum of childcare and early learning programs– will help families with the entire range of child care subsidy programs by meeting families where they are at and holding their hand through the whole process.

House Bill 3027-2 is a necessary step we can take to help families access affordable child care. Family Forward Oregon strongly urges your support for this bill.