



Date: March 20, 2023
To: House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Invest in Early Childhood and Child Care - Increase Affordability and Access to Child Care, HB 3027

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Nguyen and Scharf, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of HB 3027. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

Child care in Oregon is unaffordable, many families face financial barriers when looking for child care. "The average annual cost of infant care in Oregon is more than the cost of college tuition"¹, according to a report by the Economic Policy Institute. According to the report, "parents in Oregon pay an average of just over \$13,600 per year in child care costs for infants, while the average annual tuition at a four-year public college is \$10,363."² Child care costs continue to increase while workers in Oregon "earned an average of \$1,058 weekly in 2019, which is below the national average of \$1,139 per week."³ At this pace, workers are spending more than 25% of their wages towards child care for one child; with every child in the household, that number quickly balloons and leaves families having to make difficult decisions about which basic costs take priority. Access to affordable child care is further exacerbated for those living in child care deserts, which states that, "all Oregon counties are child care deserts for infants and toddlers and 25 of the 36 (69%) counties are deserts for preschool-age children."⁴ Per the report, "a child care desert is defined as a county with more than 3 children for every regulated child care slot, meaning there are more children needing care than there are spots unavailable."⁵ For years, Oregon families have had to choose between work and taking care of their children due to inaccessible and unaffordable child care; the implication being that for many families, advancing out of poverty and into stability, let alone thriving, is pushed further and further away with each generation.

For those families that qualify, they can turn to programs like Employment Related Day Care to fill the financial gap of escalating child care costs. But navigating the state's current system can be difficult and overwhelming for many working-class families who do not have the time nor expertise; whom could benefit immensely from the assistance of a subject matter expert. The State of Oregon routinely relies on nonprofits and our specific expertise to fill an essential role in our community; it is often the gaps in

¹ Fox 12 Oregon, For Oregon Parents, Daycare Costs More than College, 2022.

² Fox 12 Oregon, For Oregon Parents, Daycare Costs More than College, 2022.

³ Oregon Secretary of State: Oregon Blue Book, Oregon's Economy: Wages, 2023.

⁴ Oregon Early Learning Division, Oregon's Child Care Desert 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots, 2021, pg. 7.

⁵ Oregon Early Learning Division, Oregon's Child Care Desert 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots, 2021, pg. 4.



service and assistance that we step into; especially if those needs are culture-specific. “Recent research revealed clear disparities in how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted child care for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families in Oregon.”⁶ Before the COVID-19 pandemic, child care needs were not being met, especially for Black families. Our entire economy is dependent on equitable access to child care. Like roads and bridges, affordable, high-quality child care is a necessary infrastructure. Parents need affordable and accessible child care that provides peace of mind that their children are learning and loved. Employers need their employees to have access to reliable, affordable child care so they can return to work.

With HB 3027, we can support families’ employment and address their child care needs with the expansion of the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program. HB 3027 directs the Department of Early Learning and Care to enter into contracts with entities to provide services as a navigator for the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program. The ERDC navigator will assist families enrolling in ERDC and finding care that meets their family’s needs, being sure to contract with culture-specific community-based organizations, who would then become ERDC navigators. By expanding the pool of readily available navigators to be inclusive of culturally specific community-based organizations, you increase the opportunity for a family to work with someone that shares that cultural background and ensure they get the services they need; currently we know that communities do not have enough child care providers that can be accessed when needed. If we do nothing, families will continue to struggle navigating the ERDC program and their family’s needs will not be addressed.

Please pass HB 3027 to make child care accessible and support families navigating the ERDC program. Our families, children, and economy are depending on your support, especially Black families who experience disparities when looking for child care.

Respectfully,

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⁶ Oregon Early Learning Division, Oregon’s Child Care Desert 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots, 2021, pg. 14.