

Submitter: Amber Fortin
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

April 24, 2023

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to tell you about Head Start. I have worked in the preschool/childcare center for over 15 years. I have worked for HSYC since 2018. Being with children in a childcare/preschool setting is making every child feel connected and safe. Often times, we spend more time with the child than the family themselves are able to. There are many factors to why this is.

A little bit about what Head Start provides. We provide free preschool to children ages 3-4. We support language, literacy and emotional development and we are located in every county of Oregon. EVERY! We provide nutrition support, health care support and prioritize working with families to help them stay engaged in their child's education. Children eligible for OPK come from families who earn less than 100% of federal poverty level, are currently homeless, in foster care or families receiving benefits.

Our program faces many of the same challenges that other non-profits do. Operating and building costs have increased, workforce and labor shortages are impacting early learning programs and many Head Start programs don't have the space to enroll more children.

One of the reasons we struggle with workforce and labor shortages is our pay. We stay because we love what we do. But our paychecks do not reflect what we do. Everyday is a new day. We are unsure how the day is going to go and what behaviors we may encounter. Some days go smoothly and other days it is chaotic and stressful.

I will speak for myself, I DO NOT MAKE ENOUGH MONEY TO SURVIVE! If I did not have a working fiancé, then I would not have a house to live in. Cost of living is increasing; food costs are rising. I make just enough to not qualify for food stamps, but there are months where our family could really use it. Every year I have to fight with myself on if I can keep coming to work every day. Can my family be put through this another year, hoping that people will see what the impact we do for families and children and pay us what we deserve. I can barely pay childcare for my daughter and I need childcare to work. But if I am paying more than makes sense to childcare, then why do I work? Do you see my dilemma?

My child is also in the early Head Start program and will transition to Head Start come fall of 2023. The support both my family and daughter receive is amazing. My daughter has learned social cues, ways to ask for help, cooperate play, ways to identify her feelings. This has helped at home with fit throwing.

I urge you to help us get paid even as much as a kindergarten teacher. We need it

and we deserve it.
Amber Fortin