

Submitter: Rujuta Gaonkar
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Co-Chairs Senator Steiner and Rep Sanchez, Members of the Committee:

My name is Rujuta Gaonkar, I'm a resident of Portland, Oregon and the devoted parent to a dynamic and creative 13 year old.

I'm writing to request that the state budget continues to invest in the scaffolding of funding to support child care because this crisis is something that I've only witnessed getting worse than the crisis that was already in place over a decade ago, during my early days as a parent.

As soon as I moved past the first trimester of my pregnancy, I immediately starting putting my name on the waiting lists of various child care providers, often involving a non-refundable application fee with no guarantee of admission, in hopes that something would become available by time my son was born and I had to return to work. While I was fortunate that something came through when I needed it, I first had to pay an exorbitant amount and expend countless hours of energy to search for a nanny to fill gaps, experiencing turnover and challenges as they found more lucrative options. I continued to receive offers of admissions long after my need had passed, including one that I received when my son was four years old (having applied before he was born). This challenge has only worsened, to the point where parents are forced to spend more, travel further and compromise on what they're looking for in a provider – all the while spending an exorbitant and unsustainable portion of their income to facilitate care.

Once admitted in child care, the providers who cared for my son were among the most compassionate, patient and skilled individuals I had encountered. It takes a certain type of person to demonstrate the skills, the confidence, the patience and the compassion to care for our children, one of the most important and significant early influences in our child's lives, and a critical one. Yet, one by one, they would leave to explore work opportunities that supported them both emotionally and financially. The amazing people who care for our children can't afford to stay in the child care field - and this harms all of us.

This system was already in crisis before COVID hit. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the crisis has gotten exponentially worse and this has had cascading impacts on children, on parents & caregivers, on the child care workforce, on our economy, and on our well-being as a whole.

The budget reflects our values. So as you are making decisions, I hope you will show that you value our families. We have the money. We have savings. it's time to use them. Please invest in child care.

Thank you.