

To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
From: Child Care for Oregon
Date: February 11, 2025
RE: In Support of HB 3008

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Fragala and Harbick, members of the committee:

As an early childhood professional of 10 years in Jackson County, I am writing to the committee today to express my strong support for HB 3008. When I graduated college at SOU in 2008, I went into the workforce wanting to make a difference in my community. And after a major career change (from law enforcement to early childhood), I realized that the type of change I wanted to make for my community actually starts with supporting the young children of my community and their families. It is hard work to support my own family as well as other children and their families, but I cannot imagine myself doing anything else in the world. This legislation has the potential to make a significant difference in the lives of other childcare professionals such as myself, childcare businesses, and the families we work with.

As an early childhood professional (or life coach for young children), I know firsthand the hardships professionals face in this industry. Low wages have made it difficult to make ends meet (especially for a single parent like myself), and the lack of benefits forces us to decide whether we can continue in this line of work. It does not at all surprise me that there is such a significant gap in the early childhood workforce; with low wages and little to no benefits, it is honestly difficult to be able to support myself and my family each month. Wanting a better wage, help with furthering my education, and getting paid time off so I could spend time with my own children, this past year I changed my place of employment. However, I quickly realized within the first month that my new place of employment does not have an affordable health insurance option for my WHOLE family. "Can't you get your kids on OHP??" was response from peers and new coworkers. I was confused - with the amount of work that I was going to be expected to complete each day, week, and month at this new organization, I found that this readily available "benefit" (at many early childhood establishments) is failing so many people in this field. We are working hard to take care of other children, but are also struggling to take care of our own children while doing this type of work. Not wanting the state to take care of *two more children*, I tried my best to find a private insurance option. I want to be fully responsible for paying my children's health insurance. Long story short, this private option turned out to be a scam. I was scammed by a company preying upon people who are desperate.

House Bill 3008 helps us address these problems. By continuing to invest in the Child Care Recognition Payment Program and childcare apprenticeship programs across the state, this legislation will support childcare professionals like myself by providing financial support during economic uncertainty, expanding pathways and hands-on training for those interested in the industry without having to take on debt, and supporting childcare businesses that are struggling to recruit and retain workers. I was a recipient of the Child Care Recognition Payment fund this past year. It helped me keep financially afloat while I transitioned into my new role at my new place of employment. I had some extra money to pay regular bills as well as help out with the cost increase of multiple things like gas, milk and eggs. Surely, I am not the only single parent working in the early childhood field and surely, I will not be the last. I know there are other early childhood professionals that understand the financial, emotional and physical struggle of working in this field. My hope is that this fund option continues and that those who truly need some extra cash to help make the financial stress a little lighter, have the option to apply in the future.

As an early childhood professional, I believe that HB 3008 aligns with my core values of promoting quality, affordability, and accessibility in childcare. We cannot have these things without a strong, diverse, and supported workforce. By investing in this workforce, we can ensure that all workers are supported in their careers while early childhood providers are guaranteed high-quality workers to care for young Oregonians, our future. I cannot do this work alone or with only a few working beside me. There are simply too many needs to be met. I fear that more and more people are turning away from this field due to many teaching positions not providing workers an affordable wage with medical, dental and vision benefits so they can properly take care of their families. Advertising OHP/Jackson Care Connect/Medicaid to early childcare professionals as a benefit is unacceptable and should be put to a stop.

In conclusion, I urge you to support House Bill 3008. This legislation has the potential to make a significant difference in the lives of Oregon early childhood professionals like me. By investing in the workforce, we can ensure that all workers are supported in their careers while providers are guaranteed high-quality workers to care for young Oregonians.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

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