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To whom it may concern,

During the public hearing for HB 3011, I testified on the morning of February 11, 2015. To follow up on that meeting, I am writing this letter to further support building the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Workforce. The ECE workforce has a significant shortage in teaching staff to offset the growing need for child care. As you may be aware, several in-home licensed providers went out of business during the pandemic due to not being able to access PPP loans if they were self-employed, which many were. In addition to the shortage of teaching staff and providers, the current state of the economy has exasperated the problem even further through child care costs becoming unaffordable. This has put a strain on providers to not raise their child care rates. For example, Giggles & Grace has not raised their rates since 2019 to not place more of burden on families that are struggling to pay the current rates. Moreover, this problem is further compounded by the lack of Oregon Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program funding. The program has an extensive waitlist therein for double working families in low-to-moderate income families.

Giggles & Grace has a diversified revenue stream that includes private-pay, state, and federal funded families. We endured through the pandemic and kept our doors open the entire time to allow essential workers to maintain employment. However, the lack of experienced and classroom ready staff has created challenges for growing services in addition to a lack of funds to pay them to meet the growing demand for ECE services. Thus, we need this funding from HB3011 as the first solution to this complex problem. We then need to create partnerships that support the college education and on-the-job training to maintain and grow programming and for Oregon to find a solution to ERDC funding shortages and the waitlist problem therein.

In the meantime, Giggles & Grace has chosen to partner with a local Malheur County partner in Eastern Oregon, Treasure Valley Community College, to implement a short-term pilot program solution that may create a system that could be replicated. We are partnering to open an ECE Lab Class that will provide live observation of preschool classrooms and internships for college students to best prepare them for the ECE field. In return, the college will pay Giggles & Grace for the space of the Lab Class Observation Room, the funds of which can then be utilized in a scholarship manner for families on the ERDC waitlist. We first used this financial avenue of support for our families during the pandemic with the support of The Ford Family Foundation.

If we had not been forward-thinking over the past few years, we would have potentially closed our doors, or at minimum downsized child care services in addition to reducing our payroll costs significantly. In conclusion, we need the support of HB3011 in addition to a fix within ERDC at the state level as even organizations like Giggles & Grace, where we have generally been financially solvent, cannot even afford to maintain our programming in the current economic environment.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Shawn C. Reynolds".

Shawn C. Reynolds  
Giggles & Grace Early Learning Center, Inc., Executive Director