

February 18, 2025

TO: House Committee Early Childhood & Human Services

FROM: Michelle Fuentes, Our Children Oregon

SUBJECT: Support for HB 3496

Chair Hartman, Vice Chairs Scharf & Nguyen, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michelle Fuentes. I am a Policy and Advocacy Intern with Our Children Oregon (OCO). OCO is a statewide nonprofit committed to whole child wellbeing through the Children's Agenda- a comprehensive legislative agenda created and supported by our over 135 member organizations across the state.

Access to quality child care supports children's developing brains and bodies. Child care also supports parents' ability to work and attend college. Further, child care supports the economy, allowing companies to fill open positions with a ready workforce. In short, **Oregon kids, families, and businesses need child care.**

Yet, most counties in Oregon are child care deserts. To expand child care, we need workable physical locations, skilled workforce, and operating subsidies. **HB 3496 supports efforts to find suitable child care locations.** The legislation directs the Department of Land Conservation and Development to create model code and a best practice guide to make it easy for cities and counties to do the right thing - make it easier for child care providers to navigate local zoning, building code, and permitting processes.

This bill is important to me because I am a single parent of two children and finding childcare providers is a significant barrier for parents who are trying to go to college or the workforce. My education is an opportunity for me to provide job security and financial stability for my children and I. A barrier I keep facing is finding safe and local childcare. Families in the Jackson County area and across the state are experiencing a childcare crisis. Many parents do not have many options for childcare due to long waitlists and it is expensive for working/low income families. The long processes for childcare providers is part of the reason for limited childcare providers in Southern Oregon. The complicated processes for childcare providers also create more barriers for diverse providers.

Child care providers often go through zoning, building code, and permitting processes only once or twice in the course of their career. Too often, this process is time consuming and financially devastating. But there are cities and counties in Oregon and across the nation taking proactive steps to make their codes and processes easier for child care providers. **We urge you to support HB 3496 so accessible zoning and permitting processes for child care are the norm, not the exception.**

Thank you,

Michelle Fuentes, Policy and Advocacy Intern, Our Children Oregon

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