

Submitter: Elena Barreto
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3201

Good morning, Chair Hartman, Vice Chairs Scharf and Nguyen, and members of the committee,

My name is Elena Barreto, and I am the Senior Early Childhood Policy Advisor with the Children's Institute.

This session, providers, families, and advocates from across Oregon call on the Legislature to choose children. Proactive investments in early childhood services can break cycles of poverty and ensure long-term stability for children and families across the state. When we choose children, we improve lives and reduce crisis-driven spending. Prioritizing children leads to transformative outcomes, especially since 90% of a child's brain develops by age 5, making early childhood a critical period for cognitive, physical, and emotional growth.

One way to choose children this session is to support access to adequate, healthy nutrition through the Child and Adult Care Food Program. CACFP promotes health and development, strengthens the quality of child care, and stabilizes providers' budgets, many of whom are small business owners operating within a 1% profit margin. Oregon is already investing in K-12 school meals, so investing in CACFP is an obvious choice to support the health and development of our youngest Oregonians.

The cost of food is high and reimbursement rates are simply not keeping up with food prices. According to the USDA, from 2020 to 2024, U.S. food prices rose by 23.6%. Although the federal government adjusts CACFP reimbursement rates annually, the 2024-25 increases of 1% for home-based child care and 4% for centers—are insufficient to meet rising costs. For context, this 1% increase on the \$1.65 breakfast reimbursement for a Tier I family child care provider, like Dusty, is just one penny.

We urge you to support this bipartisan and bicameral bill to strengthen CACFP and ensure that children in Oregon have access to the nutritious food they need to thrive. Investing in CACFP is crucial for the well-being and development of our early learners. By prioritizing funding for this essential program, we can promote early childhood development, address food insecurity, support childcare providers, enhance equity and inclusion, and realize broader economic benefits.

Several childcare providers wished to be here but can't because they are currently caring for children across the state, so they have submitted testimony on OLIS.

We deeply appreciate your time and attention.

Elena Barreto,
Children's Institute