

Submitter: Rene Brandon
On Behalf Of: SB 5514
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5514

Good afternoon Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz, and Members of the Committee, my name is Rene Brandon, Early Learning Hub Director from Southern Oregon, serving Jackson and Josephine counties. In 2024, the Oregon Talent Assessment identified two jobs that are critical to Oregon's economy: truck drivers and child care. Today I am talking about the importance of access to child care for working families.

As you know, Oregon is a child care desert with fewer than 33% of children having access to a slot – and that is BEFORE considering affordability.

Here's the story of one of our local families who received a subsidized slot:

This parent had not been able to find care for her toddler son that was safe and affordable. Prior to starting this program, the only care she had been able to find within her budget was with a friend who had him in the car all day while she delivered groceries. He spent 4 hours a day in the car. He wasn't talking or expressing his emotions. He would just go around screaming and hitting things all day long after he was out of the car. She hated doing this but had no other choice. She could only afford \$500/month and even paying this left her with no food money and she would have to go to the food banks to get food when her job would allow her to leave and do this. After entering a child care program via a subsidized slot, this child has completely changed. He comes in happy, has begun talking, and no longer screams when frustrated. Mom is happier, is no longer struggling to feed them, or worried about losing her job.

The average cost of toddler care in Oregon is almost \$17,000 per year. The median income for a single parent family is \$38,000 per year. Access to child care allows a parent to keep a job and a child to experience a high-quality supportive environment to grow and thrive.

On behalf of families, I strongly support expansion of ERDC by \$500M and current service levels for PSP, Baby Promise, and Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten funding so more families have these life changing opportunities. Thank you for the opportunity to share today.