

Submitter: Karen Prow
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Co-Chair Sanchez, Co-Chair Lieber, and members of the committee,

My name is Karen Prow, and I am the Child Care Resources Director at NeighborImpact. For the past 12 years, I have worked with early learning and care programs in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson Counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

I am here with a mix of lived experience, including providing family child care for 15 years, being a parent with limited resources, and working as a monitor for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Each of these experiences, combined with the work Child Care Resources does to serve child care programs in our community, influenced the decision to become the new CACFP sponsor for Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties.

As a child care provider, receiving reimbursement for a portion of food costs made it possible for me to offer nutritious meals to the children in my care without passing that cost along to families. The CACFP guidance on child nutrition was something I leaned on, especially when individual child nutrition needs were new to me.

As a single mom with limited resources, I experienced packing a lunch for my children, ensuring they took ample nutritious food. I did not want them to be judged because of our lack of resources and I did not want them to go without. This often meant having less food at home for other meals, but lunches were always a priority. As a family child care home monitor for CACFP, I observed the change that took place when a child care program enrolled in CACFP. Some providers needed the income from food reimbursement to offer healthy options to the children in care. I would see vegetables and fruit added to meals and portion sizes change. The reimbursement for food costs kept the provider from passing the cost on to the family, increased the nutritional value of food served, and provided some financial stability to the program.

In 2020, the Oregon Department of Education reached out to NeighborImpact, looking for a new Family Daycare Home sponsor for Central Oregon. Home-based providers can only participate in CACFP if they have a sponsoring organization. I was excited about the possibility of reengaging in this program to bring the benefits to child care providers and the families they serve. However, we could not make the budget work. The dollars given to the sponsor to administer the program fell short of what is needed to pay staff time and other expenses. Eventually, we had to say no. We knew we were passing on signing up to bring a much-needed funding stream to

our struggling providers, but it just didn't pencil out.

More recently, ODE reached out again to see if our agency could serve providers with CACFP. This time, because of the \$660,000 allocated during the 2024 legislative session, there were additional dollars available to cover costs for new and existing sponsors. With this change, our agency decided to start the process of becoming a local sponsor.

We are officially the new sponsor for Central Oregon and just onboarded our first new Family Daycare Home. They are thrilled! Word is spreading quickly that the program is available and we are working through our interest list to enroll family child care programs.

In my roll with Child Care Resource and Referral, I participate in many city, county, state and national meetings on the topic of solving the child care crisis. CACFP sits in a unique place to support financial stability of child care, reduce the financial burden on families, with the benefit of reducing food insecurity for children, families and child care providers. This existing program is full of potential, underfunded and underutilized.

Thank you for the 2024 allocation that made it possible for us to become a sponsoring organization and urge you to maintain this funding and support HB 3201. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Karen Prow
Child Care Resources Director
NeighborImpact