

OREGON'S UNMET CHILD CARE NEEDS

IT'S TIME TO INVEST: OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT



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Contents

Executive Summary	4
Oregon Is in a Child Care Crisis: Care Is Costly and in Short Supply	6
A Powerful Economic Development Tool, Child Care Investments Grow Our Economy	10
Workforce Investments Necessary for Quality Care That Generates Big Payoffs	12
A Commitment to Race, Gender, and Class Equity: Creating a Child Care System Where All Children Can Thrive	16
Child Care Means Mobility for Women, Thriving Families, and Less Poverty	20
Good Child Care Is Great for Children – And for the Whole Community	22
Facing the Child Care Crisis: First Steps and Building a Vision for All Oregon Families	24
Endnotes	25

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INTRODUCTION

Oregon families face a child care crisis at a scale that requires a public solution. Parents, providers, and employers are looking to elected leaders to create a comprehensive response, incorporating recognition of the need for a much-expanded infrastructure of care for children ages 0 to 13. In fact, **a large majority of voters believe** that access to high-quality child care and early education should be a national priority.¹

The child care deficit has profound economic and social consequences. Oregon's highest poverty age group is children under 5, at 22%, or nearly one in four.² Lack of affordable child care limits their parents' — especially mothers' — ability to make ends meet. And child poverty is the strongest indicator of adverse future health and economic outcomes.

The lack of available, affordable child care creates significant hidden costs, the impacts of which are hard to measure. In 2016, an Oregon mother acknowledged the effects of inaccessible care on her family:

“I don't like to admit it but I had to rely on her (11-year-old daughter) too much. She was denied time to be a child because she had to take care of her brother a lot, I mean a lot. I was cleaning houses and picking up extra (assisted living home) shifts and taking classes. There was no way I could afford child care. But it's not right that a child should have to lose her childhood.”

Investing in high-quality early care and education for young children is the single best investment we can make in our labor force, and it is also critical for both child wellbeing and family financial stability.

Given what is at stake — the wellbeing of our children and families, greater income stability in our communities, and thus the very future of the state — it is time for parents, political leaders, and critical stakeholders to come together to take on the child care crisis.

Oregon's Unmet Child Care Needs

IT'S TIME TO INVEST: OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT

OREGON IS IN A CHILD CARE CRISIS: CARE IS COSTLY AND IN SHORT SUPPLY

Public care is extremely limited, while private child care is both prohibitively expensive and available for only one-fifth of Oregon children under 6. Low pay for child care workers and providers keeps supply far below the need. Unstable, patchwork child care arrangements create heavy emotional and economic costs for parents and children.

A POWERFUL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL, CHILD CARE INVESTMENTS GROW OUR ECONOMY

Oregon mothers' labor force participation has dropped over 20 years, lowering GDP. Public investments in high-quality child care create a higher, more reliable economic return than other economic development strategies, including business tax incentives. Child care investments will increase the size, skill level, and wages of the labor force, both now and in the future.

WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS NECESSARY FOR QUALITY CARE THAT GENERATES BIG PAYOFFS

Poverty-level wages for child care staff harm the people who work in child care and the families they support. Low pay pushes providers out of the industry, creating instability for children in that care. Care quality is compromised by high staff turnover, truncated relationships, and insufficient professional development support.

A COMMITMENT TO RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS EQUITY: CREATING A CHILD CARE SYSTEM WHERE ALL CHILDREN CAN THRIVE

Women, people of color, and members of low-income households are over-represented in the low-paid care workforce and disproportionately provide unpaid care, hampering their ability to earn a living. High-quality early childhood education reduces racial and ethnic school achievement gaps, poverty, and inequality while fostering economic mobility.

CHILD CARE MEANS MOBILITY FOR WOMEN, THRIVING FAMILIES, AND LESS POVERTY

With free or low-cost public child care, parents – especially mothers – can maintain stable employment, obtain more education, earn higher wages, and require fewer public benefits. Child care investments are critical to reducing the gender pay gap and are a two-generation, anti-poverty strategy, helping parents now and children in the future.

GOOD CHILD CARE IS GREAT FOR CHILDREN – AND FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Strong evidence shows that safe, high quality, culturally responsive, and inclusive early childhood care builds kids' social and emotional skills, school readiness, high school graduation rates, and future earnings, while cutting crime, incarceration rates, early childbearing, and the need for public benefits. Universal care strengthens communities and produces the best results.

FACING THE CHILD CARE CRISIS: FIRST STEPS AND BUILDING A VISION FOR ALL OREGON FAMILIES

The Oregon Legislature should immediately cap family co-pays to Employment Related Day Care at or below 7% of income, and expedite the expansion of the Baby Promise program. The new Child Care Task Force should connect with efforts in other states; develop a plan for funding child care; and engage parents, caregivers, and children around the state in a conversation about the comprehensive child care system Oregon needs.



Oregon Is in a Child Care Crisis:

CARE IS COSTLY AND IN SHORT SUPPLY

Child care, like K–12 education, is a service that will never be efficiently provided by the market because parents can't afford the upfront investment costs. But in both cases, investments raise average wages so much that increased future tax revenues alone are sufficient to justify public investments.³

That's why educational investments should be seen as social infrastructure. The U.S. demonstrated to the rest of the world the economic case for public investment in elementary and secondary education, but has been left far behind when it comes to early education and child care.⁴

Private child care costs are prohibitive, despite the poverty-level earnings of staff. Publicly subsidized child care covers just a fraction of eligible low-income households and is often unaffordable or inaccessible. In 2018, the median price statewide for full-time center care of infants and toddlers was \$1,200 a month.⁵ That's comparable to in-state undergraduate tuition and fees at the University of Oregon,⁶ and out of reach for most Oregon families. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services benchmark for child care affordability is seven percent of income.⁷ At that standard, families need an income over \$200,000 annually to afford full-time care for one infant. A minimum-wage worker in rural Oregon would need to work full time for 33 ½ weeks, or from January to August, just to pay for child care for one infant.⁸

Seven of ten Oregon mothers of young children work for pay but only two of five Oregonians live in a county that is *not* a “child care desert,” referring to counties without child care providers or with so few options that there are more

than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.⁹ Inadequate supply is particularly acute for infants and toddlers. All Oregon infants and toddlers live in a “child care desert;” only one in eight has access to registered child care statewide.¹⁰ In addition, very little is available for children whose parents work in the rapidly growing occupations requiring evening and weekend hours. As in other industries, the equivalent of shift differentials are needed to incentivize child care providers to work non-standard hours.

Oregon's three public child care and preschool programs have been severely underfunded, and served only a tiny fraction of the nearly quarter of a million children under 5 in Oregon in 2018.¹¹ While the 2019 Legislative Session successfully expanded Oregon's commitment to early childhood programs, the scale of unmet need is much greater. It is too early to know exactly how new funds will be used

RELIABLE CHILD CARE IS WHAT ALLOWS ALL OTHER WORK TO BE DONE.

The number of Oregon mothers with young children who work for pay:



7 out of 10

... BUT,

The number of Oregonians who live in a county that is not a “child care desert:”



2 out of 5

*Median statewide cost of full-time, center-based infant and toddler care is **ABOUT THE SAME AS** the cost of in-state undergrad tuition & fees at University of Oregon:*

\$1,200/mo

to improve each program. The numbers that follow reflect Oregon's public child care initiatives prior to any additions the 2019 Student Success Act will allow.

Oregon's child care assistance program, Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), provides child care funding for only a fraction of the low-income working families that qualify. High co-pays and low provider reimbursement rates keep many families and providers from participating.¹²

Oregon Prekindergarten (OPK), and federally funded Head Start (HS) provide part-time care for children ages 3 to 4 living under the federal poverty line. High-quality preschool is offered four days a week for 3½ hours a day; some families receive before and after wrap-around child care as well. **Early Head Start (EHS)** for children from 0 to 2 offers a full-day, full-year program.¹³ Together, these programs serve about 20,000 kids; however, only eight percent of eligible infants and toddlers (2,064) were enrolled in EHS, and an estimated 61% of eligible children ages 3 to 4 were in HS or OPK.¹⁴

Oregon's Preschool Promise is available to children of families whose income is up to double the federal poverty line. It is offered in multiple languages by a diverse staff, with parent choice among school, community center, and family day care settings, but unfortunately, only 2,000 children statewide were served by the program as of the 2018–19 year.¹⁵

Baby Promise, a new full-day, full-year program for infants and toddlers, will run a small pilot in 2019 for low-income families. If it were to go to scale, it represents a possible strategy to address the extreme shortage of available

child care for infants and toddlers.¹⁶ However, it is currently funded for only 250 children.

Oregon's Working Families Household and Dependent Care Tax Credit is designed to reimburse low- and middle-income families for child care expenses while working, looking for work, or attending school. Policy makers are often attracted to tax credits to subsidize child care expenses, but tax credits are generally ineffective for low-income working households, which can't afford to front the money for market-rate child care on the promise of reimbursement months later. They also do little to raise wages, an absolute necessity for building a supply of high-quality child care, developing a trained workforce, and ensuring child safety.

Combined, these state and federal investments do not meet the needs of Oregon families and their children. Oregon's publicly funded programs serve about 30,000 children — only a small number of the nearly 250,000 Oregon children ages 0 to 4 needing access to the early care and education environments so critical for their healthy development.¹⁷ ●

A Powerful Economic Development Tool,

CHILD CARE INVESTMENTS GROW OUR ECONOMY

“Mothers like me need a system that can help support the values and dreams we have for our children, the little people that we are raising to be the next generation in this society. Without the support from our government, children are growing up with the stress and uncertainty that hinders their growth and development.”

– Hilda, Salem

Like public funding of social infrastructure in the form of K–12 schools, investments in early childhood education and care more than pay for themselves in increased tax revenue alone.¹⁸ The payoff in higher wages and tax revenues is measurable, but also important are decreased poverty and inequality, as well as the improvement in the quality of life.

Returns to public investment in early childhood education are very high, rising to 13% a year for birth to 5 programs for the most disadvantaged families.¹⁹ Combining free, universal preschool with free infant and toddler care for low-income families pays off at ten to one through three major impacts: higher future earnings for kids; higher earnings for parents that nearly equal their children’s wage gains; and higher earnings for other community members, due to spillover effects in the labor markets as higher-wage employers are drawn to areas with a more skilled labor force.²⁰

Universal preschool is a better regional economic development tool than more frequently enacted job creation tax

credits or property tax abatements, which actively harm regional wage growth when paid for at the expense of public education. Unless carefully targeted on local firms, new jobs created by business subsidies are often filled by newcomers, which undercuts potential gains by raising the cost of public services.

Timothy Bartik, the nation’s preeminent regional economic development economist, finds that state earnings per capita are increased by 9.45 times the investment in universal pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds and by 5.93 times the investment in high quality care from birth through age 5 for low-income children, as compared to 3.14 times for well-targeted business tax incentives.²¹

Compared to business tax incentives, investments in child care lead to bigger increases in per capita state earnings. State earnings are increased by:

9.45x

the investment in universal pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds

5.93x

the investment in high quality care from birth through age 5 for low-income children

3.14x

the investment in well-targeted business tax incentives

ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Nordic countries' 50-year commitment to gender equity is estimated to have raised per capita GDP by 10 to 20%.²² Just capping families' child care expenditures at seven percent of their incomes is estimated to expand Oregon's economy by one percent, or \$2.25 billion.²³

COSTS OF MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

Finally, it's important to recognize that the absence of a robust child care infrastructure imposes significant costs on Oregonians, now and in the future. Those costs are largely borne by children, women, people of color, and low-income families, who experience far more stress, stunted potential, economic insecurity, and impoverishment than if Oregon had invested in child care early on. Further costs are borne by others whose wages would be higher and whose need for public benefits would be less if a comprehensive child care system were in place. ●

Workforce Investments Necessary

FOR QUALITY CARE THAT GENERATES BIG PAYOFFS

Early childhood experts have learned a lot in recent decades about what constitutes the high-quality early care and education experience that is a proven investment in both children's futures and regional economic development.²⁴

"I don't leave my daughter unless I trust the childcare. I can't do my job; she comes first."

– **Sandra**
26-year-old single mother
Eastern Oregon

Better pay and teacher training, as well as professional development and coaching to help teachers hone instructional, social-emotional learning, and classroom organizational skills appear key, as well as ongoing relationships with children and other staff members. Oregon State child care expert Roberta Weber reports that the quality attributes most valued by parents are safety, caregiver warmth, and support of learning.²⁵

But unlivable wages in early childhood jobs create high levels of staff turnover, compromising quality by disrupting both relationships and skill development. The social devaluation of "women's work," especially work done disproportionately by women of color, shows clearly in salaries. In 2018 in Oregon, the median wage of preschool teachers, many of whom are college-educated, was \$13.95 an hour, and was \$11.86 for child care workers.²⁶ Average annual wages in child care are about half the all-industry Oregon average.²⁷

In Oregon, we see annual turnover in the child care workforce of between 25–30%, harming quality. Staff turnover is

THE SOCIAL DEVALUATION OF “WOMEN’S WORK,” ESPECIALLY WORK DONE DISPROPORTIONATELY BY WOMEN OF COLOR, SHOWS CLEARLY IN SALARIES.

2018 average all-industry annual salary in the state of Oregon:

\$52,000

2018 Oregon annual salary for preschool teachers:

\$30,400

2018 Oregon annual salary for child care workers:

\$26,740

WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS NECESSARY (cont.)

“My partner and I certainly wouldn’t be able to afford putting him into care at the center where I work – even with the 50% decrease in tuition costs for employees – as my partner’s and my wages together simply wouldn’t suffice. Unfortunately, we make too much for ERDC but not enough to be able to afford all of our basic needs. Therefore, I am currently looking for employment outside of the child care industry ...”

– *Jessica*
Portland

“A lot of home-based child care providers have closed in recent years, and others sometimes take in little or nothing for themselves, just to keep their businesses afloat.”

– *Christine Waters*
Director, Childcare Resource & Referral of Multnomah County

primarily driven by low wages and the inability of providers to make ends meet. Financial challenges are especially difficult for the many workers with children of their own; the average age of Oregon’s 95% female child care workforce is 37 years old. Living on child care wages, staffers are unable to afford for their own children the quality care they are providing to the children of others.²⁸

This is the situation facing Jessica in Portland.

My partner and I certainly wouldn’t be able to afford putting him into care at the center where I work — even with the 50% decrease in tuition costs for employees — as my partner’s and my wages together simply wouldn’t suffice. Unfortunately, we make too much for ERDC but not enough to be able to afford all of our basic needs. Therefore, I am currently looking for employment outside of the child care industry ...

Child care workers are paid so poorly that 53% of them nationally rely on one or more public benefits, whether Food Stamps, Medicaid, EITC, or TANF.²⁹ Oregon single mothers of one child who are employed as child care workers easily qualify for Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) themselves, even if they work year-round, full-time.

Many home-based child care providers are open up to 12 hours a day but earn little. Indeed, the Center for American Progress’ recent cost model scenarios assume that family child care owner-operators work either 60 or 75 hours a week, bringing their average hourly wages down to \$5.60 an hour.³⁰ Our public programs significantly underpay home-based child care providers for the administrative tasks required for both reporting and operating their businesses.

Oregon’s child care subsidy programs provide little for family, friend, and neighbor care, which is particularly important for those living in rural areas, working evenings and weekends, seeking culturally relevant care, or preferring care provided by relatives and friends over an institutional setting. Reimbursement rates for family, friend, and neighbor providers are set so low that providers would need to care for four infants an hour in order to earn the minimum wage.³¹ ●

UNLIVABLE WAGES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD JOBS LEAD TO HIGH RATES OF TURNOVER AND AN INABILITY TO MAKE ENDS MEET, ESPECIALLY FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN.

Annual turnover in Oregon's child care workforce:

25–30%

Average age of Oregon's 95% female child care workforce:

37

Child care workers relying on Food Stamps, Medicaid, EITC, TANF or other public benefits:

53%



A Commitment to Race, Gender, and Class Equity:

CREATING A CHILD CARE SYSTEM WHERE ALL CHILDREN CAN THRIVE

Women, people of color, and those from low-income households gain the most from public investments in high quality child care, as they provide a disproportionate amount of unpaid and poorly paid care in Oregon and the U.S. as a whole. Children from low-income households, among whom children of color and children of single mothers are significantly over-represented, are most benefited by the public provision of high-quality care that would otherwise be unaffordable.

Creating a truly universal system of care requires focusing investments first on communities and families that have historically been ignored or denied equitable access to opportunities for social mobility. Universal child care programs build community across differences, reduce poverty and economic inequality, and avoid the stigmatization and social divisiveness of means-tested benefits alone.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

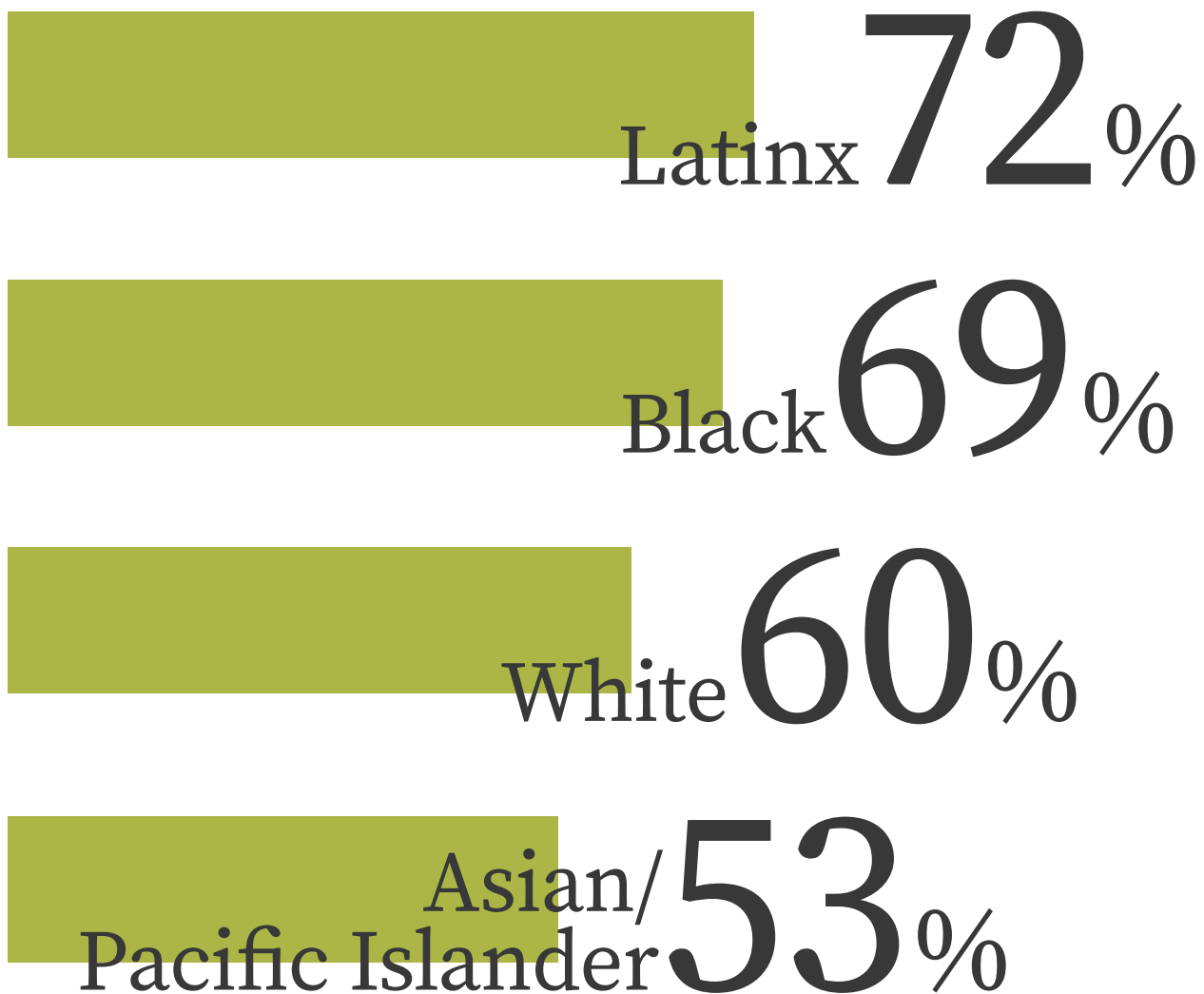
Black, Indigenous, and Latinx adults are far over-represented among the working poor because they are more likely to be tracked into low-wage occupations, and consequently have to patch together tenuous but economical child care arrangements. For this reason, historical social neglect of children's care provision has particularly harmed communities of color. People of color, especially women, are concentrated in child care and other low-wage caring occupations. Families of color also carry higher unpaid health care burdens, due to lack of access to quality health care and toxic stress as a result of systemic and interpersonal racism.³²

Culturally responsive and inclusive care in multiple languages is important for many families of color and

Due to differences in family income, a greater percentage of Black and Hispanic full-time, year-round working parents would experience child care prices above the federal affordability benchmark. Sixty-nine percent of Black and 72% of Hispanic working parents would face unaffordable child care, compared to 60% of white and 53% of Asian/Pacific Islander working parents.

– *Data-for-Equity Policy Brief:*
Child Care Affordability

The percentage of parents who work year-round, full-time for whom child care fees would exceed the federal affordability benchmark:



Researchers have noted that a \$5,000 increase in a family's income made a significant difference in children's success in school.

\$5,000/yr

immigrants, both for parents to feel confident in the care and to reduce racial disparities in discipline in early childhood environments. Child care deserts reflect not only a lack of “slots” in child care centers, but also a lack of well-funded and diverse care options. A variety of child care settings is essential to meeting the needs of all Oregon families, and is only possible with culturally responsive and inclusive training supports in multiple languages.

GENDER

Child care investments are essential to achieving economic gender equality. Women, especially single mothers, are asked to accomplish the impossible — both to support their families and to provide unpaid care for children, the sick, and the elderly. A lack of affordable child care has undermined women's full participation in the labor force, as many women work part-time or are forced out of the labor force entirely to meet family care demands. Too many children, particularly girls, provide care for their siblings at a cost to their own academic and social development.

Women are under-represented in civic life, high-wage occupations, upper management in both public and private sectors, and in political leadership. In the Nordic countries, which commit the

most resources to child care, a higher proportion of women work, gender wage gaps are the narrowest, and women's and children's poverty rates are low. The World Economic Forum 2018 Global Gender Gap Report ranks the U.S. as 51st among the world's nations for gender equity.³³

LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

Investments in child care are a proven two-generation, anti-poverty strategy. For instance, over the last ten years, Washington, D.C.'s full-day universal preschool program, which included wrap-around child care supports, significantly increased mothers' abilities to work more hours and earn higher wages while also starting to universalize the critical enrichment that previously only affluent families could afford to provide their children. In addition, participation in a high-quality child care environment sets kids on a path to success in school, higher earnings, and economic mobility.³⁴

It has been clearly shown that even small increases in family income make a significant difference in children's success in school. Researchers credit adding amounts as low as \$5,000 a year to a poor family's budget with reducing stress on parents so significantly that children fare better in school.³⁵ ●

Child Care Means Mobility for Women,

THRIVING FAMILIES, AND LESS POVERTY

WOMEN

Lack of access to child care means that women work less than they would like to and earn less when they do work. Women's labor force participation rates are falling in Oregon and in the U.S., while rising in countries with significant commitments to public child care, paid family leave, and other family programs.³⁶

In fact, most of the wage gap between men and women is attributable to the income losses women experience when becoming mothers, called the motherhood penalty. Taking just one year out of the labor force in 15 years now results in a 39% drop in annual earnings for women, according to a new study by the Institute for Women and Policy Research.³⁷ Universally available child care would greatly reduce the income inequity still faced by women.

Yet, facing the current exorbitant prices for child care, many mothers can't afford to commit to work and career growth, despite the price to be paid in lifetime earnings, pension benefits, and — too often — poverty in old age.

FAMILIES

Working and middle-class Oregon families, ineligible for publicly subsidized child care, increasingly sacrifice their economic security and savings, whether by paying as much or more for child care as they do for a mortgage, or by keeping a skilled person out of the full-time labor market. Child care for two children — an infant and a 4-year-old — is nearly twice the average rent in Oregon.³⁸

Child care cost for two children in Oregon:

\$23,677/yr

Average statewide rent:

\$12,145/yr

As a direct result of the high cost of child care and women's reduced work hours and wages, nearly one in four Oregon children under 5 live in poor households, a higher rate than for any other age group.³⁹ Meanwhile, states like Minnesota are seeing results from child care investments. As compared to Oregon, 50% more Minnesotan kids ages 0 to 4 are enrolled in child care; the poverty rate for kids under 5 is two-thirds of ours; and the median household income in Minnesota is more than \$8,000 a year higher than Oregon's.⁴⁰ ●

"Being a mom of young children has also interrupted my career track. I lose chances for career development, new positions within my work, or trainings that would lead me to making more money in the future."

– Kelly
Milwaukie



Good Child Care Is Great for Children —

AND FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

*Early childhood investments are extremely cost effective social policy. They are the most effective strategy for raising high school graduation rates and improving the life chances of kids who participate, reducing the risks of poverty, crime and incarceration, substance abuse, early childbearing, and the need for public benefits.*⁴¹

Previously, much of the research showing that good, quality preschool programs promote children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development, with effects that can last for years, was confined to relatively small programs such as the Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Program, or was focused only on Head Start programs.⁴² A recent study of 84 preschool programs concluded that children make significant gains across language, reading, and math skills, effects that can promote their wellbeing and progress throughout life.⁴³ These gains were greatest for low-income children but they were also clearly present for middle-class children.⁴⁴

One recent investigation examined preschool programs that “scaled up” in the cities of Tulsa and Boston.⁴⁵ Findings reveal students gaining between a half and a full year of additional learning in reading and math, important markers for school success. Another study, a parental assessment, found that a majority of parents thought that child care had a very positive effect on their children’s physical health, and half believed that their children gained healthier eating habits.⁴⁶

Importantly too, as discussed above, the meaning of good care reflects more than school readiness and physical wellbeing. Low-income families, families of color, and immigrant families are familiar with underfunded and understaffed programs and services. There are no other options for their communities. Intergenerational experiences with bigotry and mistreatment are embedded in family as well as national history. Low-income African American, Latinx, and immigrant mothers often speak of fearing unsafe, overcrowded, and biased treatment of their children. Good quality child care and preschool for these communities must incorporate the concerns that parents bring with them. ●

Facing the Child Care Crisis:

FIRST STEPS AND BUILDING A VISION FOR ALL OREGON FAMILIES

Right away, state subsidy rules could change the current co-pay rate that many families cannot afford. The new rate should reflect the federal affordability standard set at 7%, making ERDC available to many more families.

We could also expand Baby Promise this year and start to reduce the statewide child care deserts for infant and toddler care.

LONGER TERM, WE NEED A VISION OF OREGON'S CHILD CARE FUTURE!

OREGON SHOULD BECOME A KEY STATE LEADER, linking with other states, to revolutionize the nation's commitment to child care. As the large majority of voters have made clear, they are ready for public leaders to take this issue on. Exciting efforts are underway around the nation, and Oregon's new Legislative Task Force (HB2346) should connect with those other statewide efforts in building a bold vision for a publicly funded, universal, high-quality, culturally relevant, and accessible child care system in Oregon – one that creates economy-boosting child care jobs and supports the rest of Oregon's workforce.

SPEAKING OF COSTS AND BENEFITS: Equally critical, Oregon's new Task Force, in collaboration with local experts and advocates, **must develop a plan for increasing funding to make child care available to all Oregon families.** Part of this plan must shine a light on the extraordinary toll that women, families, and communities *are already paying*. **Making child care available is a long-term state savings and boosts our local economies.** It is also taking the stand that in this state, our children matter most.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Critical to the Oregon child care vision is hearing from parents, caregivers, and children. This means taking the time and making the investment to hold community meetings in locations accessible and comfortable for diverse families across the state, as well as engaging diverse communities, rural and urban, that are impacted by the child care crisis in similar and different ways. These voices must be present at all steps of the policy development process. We risk replicating existing race, gender, class, and rural-urban inequities if we do not involve all communities in designing solutions and in building a shared vision of child care in Oregon.

ENDNOTES

Page 6: Oregon Is in a Child Care Crisis ...

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