



## Labor community

By Eryn Byram, Executive Director, Labor's Community Service Agency & Lisa Dodson, PhD., Co-leader, Scholars Strategy Network Oregon

### No childcare means parents can't work. What can be done?

Working families and the childcare industry are completely interdependent: You can't have one without the other. Without stable and good quality childcare, union workers in the trades can't build the state's infrastructure, public workers can't provide critical services, and private sector workers can't do their jobs. From the provider side, without robust investment to support the childcare infrastructure, there will be a dramatic decline in care options. From every workforce angle, investment in childcare is critically important for working families.

Yet over the last decade, even before the pandemic, unstable earnings led many providers to shut their doors. Working parents in need of flexible family child care were hit the hardest by this loss. In fact, in Oregon, more than a third of family child care providers have closed over the last seven years, turning much of the state into a childcare desert.

Then, things got a lot worse. In February 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic hit, and the fragile childcare sector imploded. *The Washington Post* reported that more than half of all childcare providers closed.

Anneliese Sheahan, steward for AF-SCME 132, which represents Oregon Family Child Care providers, says there's a disaster unfolding.

"Family childcare was really strained before. But over the next few months, I think we could lose 25% of all providers—permanently. That leaves families competing over what's left."

Working parents in all employment sectors will be affected. But most harmed will be working families that rely on the kind of childcare that serves parents in the trades, healthcare, and other industries with nonstandard work schedules. Importantly, this has an outsized effect on working moms who are now 38% of family breadwinners in Oregon.

The demand for a childcare system that truly serves working class families led to the founding of Labor Littles, a new nonprofit organization. Started by Eryn Byram at Labor's Community Service Agency and Christina Daniels, an electrical tradeswoman with 30 years of experience, the mission of Labor Littles is twofold. The program matches the needs of union families working in sectors with non-traditional scheduling. It also builds much needed financial stability in another overlooked job sector; some of the 3,000 family-based childcare providers in Oregon.

In response to the looming childcare crisis, the Columbia Pacific Building Trades and IBEW Local 48 have recognized the value of a stable network of childcare providers with worker-friendly policies. COVID-19 has only deepened the urgency of shoring up this childcare industry so that their membership has good-quality care for

their children. But the demand for childcare doesn't end with the building trades. Other union leadership from healthcare and retail, for example, recognize that their members also face deep economic harm without good and stable childcare.

Labor Littles is ready to take a lead role in developing a network of childcare providers both for working parents and parents who are in education and apprenticeship programs. But that can only happen with a significant commitment from labor unions as well as the state. Every sector of Oregon's labor community is dependent on reliable, quality childcare, and now is the time for the whole community to step up. Labor Littles has set a goal of raising \$500,000 to hire a director and provide resources to start up a family childcare provider network for working families.

For more information, contact Eryn Byram at [director@LCSAportland.org](mailto:director@LCSAportland.org).

Our working families  
deserve a better  
future.

I will fight for you in  
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