



Testimony
Oregon House Early Childhood and Family Supports Committee
Informational Panel - Voluntary Home Visiting
February 7, 2017
Capital – Salem, OR

Participant for the Record:

Martha Brooks **Oregon State and Western State Director,
Council for A Strong America
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, ReadyNation,
Champions for America's Future, Mission Readiness
Early Learning Council – Council Member**

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Lively and members of the Committee for the opportunity to address you today on the issue of voluntary home visiting in Oregon.

My name is Martha Brooks and I am the State and Western Regional Director for Council for A Strong America. Most of you are familiar with our largest organization, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS OREGON. They are a national non-partisan organization of over 5000 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, attorneys general, other law enforcement leaders and survivors of violence with over 140 members in Oregon, dedicated to preventing crime by investing in proven programs that get kids started on the right track.

ReadyNation is a national bi-partisan organization of over 1,500 business leaders with over 50 members in Oregon, dedicated to building workforce by promoting solutions that prepare kids to succeed in education, work and life.

I am also a member of the Early Learning Council and Chair of the Best Beginnings Committee charged with Pre-natal to age 3 issues.

Our purpose here today is to give you information on voluntary home visiting, what it does, how it works, and why you should be interested.

From the perspective of the members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS they absolutely believe dangerous criminals must be put behind bars, but locking them up is not the entire solution to crime. In fact, it is the end solution. A key component to crime reduction is early prevention in the form of voluntary home visiting such as Healthy Families America (HFA), Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) and Early Head Start (EHS) - all volunteer parent coaching program and all programs we have in Oregon and all serving specific at risk populations. However, these programs also improve school readiness, increase the

OREGON

chances at-risk children will graduate from school on time, answer many of the issues faced by poverty and definitely increase the health and well being of both mother and child. And the return on investment can be almost \$6 (\$5.70 – *Pew Charitable Trusts-2011*) for every public dollar spent. These savings are in reduced criminal justice, health and mental health costs; decreased welfare dependency and increased employment. One study found that infants who received either HFA (Oregon's HFO program) or NFP had 60 percent lower mortality rates than comparison groups.

All of us are horrified by cases of child abuse and neglect in newspaper headlines, but we seldom stop to think about the ultimate toll or what we can do to stop abuse and neglect. Nurse Family Partnership for example has the ability to reduce child abuse and neglect by as much as 50%. What that means in short is not after the fact, when a child and family hit the doors of DHS, but those families never see DHS. It is up-front and preventative instead of an after the fact intervention.

What is voluntary home visiting?

Voluntary home visiting programs provide critical support to vulnerable children and families by matching new and expectant parents with trained professionals to provide information and mentoring. Guidance and support by trusted professionals for parents during pregnancy and the first few years of a child's life can change the dynamics of a family for generations. As we know, parenting is the biggest challenge many people will face. For single and teen parents, this challenge is amplified. Voluntary parent coaching gives at-risk parents (often single parents) counseling, coaching, and support on a range of crucial parenting skills.

During a home visit, a nurse or trained home visiting professional helps parents learn about early physical and emotional development. They provide families with the tools necessary to manage stress and anxiety, resources to ensure their child is safe, and techniques to effectively guide a toddler way from problem behaviors. Home visiting/parent coaching gives parents the ability to navigate through parenthood as constructive supportive parents instead of scared and ill-equipped parents. Often times, the professional home visitor will recognize needs of the family and help them navigate to other needed resources such as EI/ECSE, ERDC, medical resources, mental health services and much more, all helping to make families in Oregon safe and stable.

If a family chooses to receive home visits from trained professionals then it can make a positive difference for children and families. The unfortunate piece of home visiting is that we have so little resources for the programs.

Oregon Home Visiting Programs

In Oregon we have been leaders for years and continue to be leaders. Through collaboration with the Early Learning Division and the Oregon Health Authority, home-visiting programs over the last few



OREGON

years have functioned in unison, providing better coverage and service to the high needs pre-natal to age 3 families in the state.

Healthy Families America, A nationally recognized evidence based program, known here as **Healthy Families Oregon (HFO)** is a statewide program, is the state's largest home visiting program administered through the Early Learning Division and Early Learning Council as Healthy Families Oregon and is accredited by national HFA. The program was first approved and given overwhelming support by the Legislature in 1992 to serve families. Services began in 1993 and today there is a program in all 36 counties covering almost 2,600 children (2,549). Up until four years ago, this program was for first time parents but now thanks to the Oregon Legislature the program was allowed to change and cover subsequent births. They can cover mothers prenatally through age 3. Families can come in to this program up to 90 days after giving birth. Two years ago, the program underwent a revision with a statewide RFP process that regionalized the programs to coincide with their HUB areas.

Another nationally recognized evidence based program, **Nurse Family Partnership** is a program administered through the Oregon Health Authority that covers low-income first-time mothers. These visits must begin during pregnancy and can continue through two-three years after birth. In my 14 years as the state director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, I have seen this program grow from one lone program to expand in to 6-8 counties and cover almost 300 families annually. This expansion as well as some expansion of HFO and expansion of EHS comes through our federal grants of MIECHV (Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting). This is a wonderful series of grants that I am personally proud of as we advocated and helped secure MIECHV funding. Rep Piluso was instrumental in our first federal funding when she, as Police Chief of Gresham and two other Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members visited with Sen. Wyden to advocate and obtain first time funding. We have continued to be successful on a federal level with reauthorization coming again this next year. Without reauthorization, these services will more than likely go away.

As mentioned, MIECHV also helped expand EHS and with both state and federal funding 2,339 children were served in 2015-2016. While HFO and NFP are what are referred to as home based services, EHS can be either home based or center based, depending on the needs of the community. This is a program for low-income parents and can also serve subsequent births.

While I have focused on HFO, NFP and EHS, Oregon also has other supportive programs such as Baby's First, Cocoon, and Maternal Case Management through the Oregon Health Authority. *And as a note, I am concerned personally with the reduction in funding for Baby's First. While a small amount this and other home visiting programs leverage Medicaid funding. It would be a shame to see this eliminated from the continuum of home visiting services.*

With the new charge of the Early Childhood and Family Supports Committee, I suspect it will become your charge to take the overall view of home visiting in Oregon. With that in mind, I want to tell you that the Best Beginnings Committee of the Early Learning Council has spent the last 18 months

StrongNation.org/FightCrime

OREGON

coordinating and working on a combined set of metrics and a universal entry tool for home visiting. We have found that much of this work is happening organically in many counties, but not in all. Take for example Yamhill – their home visiting teams sit down together each week and discuss what families are in the area, which needs services, who has an opening and who is best suited for the families. They have also committed to and hired a “universal screener” reducing the number of times families are interviewed for home visiting services. We have encouraged this to happen in more areas and hope that the tools we will be providing will benefit this process. Some communities are further along than others. This work has been done in conjunction with the ELC, ELD, OHA and DHS, as all have home visiting programs. These agencies continue through the CCO’s, HUB’s, communities and programs to continue to integrate their services.

Best Beginnings has also been looking at the continuing educational needs of home visitors. HFA, NFP and EHS have educational standards for their programs, but once completed, mostly on the front end of employment, there is little opportunity for higher-level training and education. We know that educational opportunities are being considered for pre-k and other early childhood programs and welcome the opportunity for home visitors to be included and thought of as this process moves forward. This committee will continue to work over the next year and is also made up of providers, the ELC, ELD and OHA. We will be looking towards OHA for their leadership as they just received another federal MIECHV grant focusing on professional training and education.

A parent education component should not be left out as well and this work has been on going.

Quickly, I want to explain how MIECHV has helped with this work. Oregon has applied for and received all 7 federal MIECHV grants totaling \$46,398,539 from 2010 through the newest grant awarded April 2016- Sept 2018. Oregon, through the OHA became part of a 4 state MIECHV grant with Washington State, Idaho and Alaska for professional development. This is a first and one of a kind grant through MIECV that we are proud to be a part of. Previous grants have awarded funds for the state to analyze the systems, the needs and the outcomes, putting us on track to knowing who and where services are best directed. This analysis is a little outdated, but helped in the coordination of services between agencies that did not exist prior to the grant. Other grants have provided technical assistance and direct funding for programs, program development and direct services to families. Approximately \$30M over a 6-year period has gone to direct service to families. A long awaited database system is soon to be on line, but funding is minimal. In order to expand the needed database, more investments will be needed outside of MIECHV. These grants have been instrumental in the coordination of our home visiting system and both the ELD and OHA continue in that collaborative vein.

This last biennium, HFO statewide went through an RFP process for each program area and presently has 17 providers who were awarded contracts that cover the entire state that align with HUB boundaries. Relief Nurseries also administers some home visiting programs and some hold HFO contracts. DHS also has a Family Supports and Connections program designed to strengthen families



OREGON

and support effective parenting. This differs from the other programs in that you must be participating in TANF to receive services.

While programs are technically not allowed to keep a waiting list, all have a “queue.” We know that statewide we are only service approximately 20% of those families eligible. Many who want the service cannot access home visiting because of a lack of resources and funding. In Oregon, 40% of our families have two or more ACES indicators and yet we can only provide the essential services for far fewer. Programs have to pick and choose between who gets services and who does not and they go with the highest at need, leaving many to fend for themselves. Many of these families eventually end up costing us more through interaction with DHS and/or the criminal justice system and more. With 80% of brain development happening between birth and age 3, - 700 new neural connections every second - it is these early years that investments are critical. Yet, as of last biennium session, for every dollar spent on K-12, only sixteen cents was spent on early childhood. If you look at Nobel Prize winner Economist James Heckman’s graph on Returns on Investment, you can easily see that the investments do not match the need. He in fact says that *“early childhood investments (pre-natal to age 5) are an efficient and effective investment for economic and workforce development. The earlier the investment, the greater the return on investment.”*

You will find in your online packets of information a report released by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon about the critical need for home visiting investments.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.