



January 23, 2019

Chair Monnes Anderson and members of the committee:

As a scientific expert in early childhood development, and a resident of the state of Oregon since 1988, I would like to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 526, which will establish a groundbreaking, universally accessible home visiting program for all new parents in Oregon by utilizing the Family Connects® model.

By way of introduction, I am Philip H. Knight Chair and Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon, where I am founding Director of the Center for Translational Neuroscience. I am also a Senior Fellow at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, where I am member of the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. While others may testify to the cultural, medical, or financial benefits to this policy, I would like to briefly provide a unique perspective on why--as it relates to the study of brain science and early childhood development --a universal home visiting program can be extremely beneficial to the newborns it serves, both short and long term.

Simply put, “Brains are built over time, and the foundations of brain architecture are constructed early in life. The neural connections that comprise the structure of the developing brain are formed through an ongoing process that begins before birth, continues into adulthood, and establishes either a sturdy or weak foundation for all the health, learning, and behavior that follow.(1)” To provide further context, in the early years of life, more than 1 million neural connections are formed per second.

This means that every moment of a child’s first year is critical to their long-term development. If parents are facing any nutritional, physical or environmental challenges with their child, struggling with postpartum depression, or even simply having trouble getting the newborn to feed properly, they may need additional resources and support outside of their primary care provider and family to resolve these issues. By rolling out the Family Connects® model, the State would be taking a significant step in ensuring that all new parents in Oregon have the resources they need to make this critical developmental period count. This is made possible by the vast range of community services a Family Connects® Registered Nurse can help the family navigate: programs for nutrition, safety, parenting technique, physical and mental health, and more.

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

1227 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1227
T (541) 346-4921 F (541) 346-4911

Having worked in the development of effective, evidence-based early intervention programs for vulnerable children for close to 30 years, and having participated in many conversations and studies regarding how to apply critical findings from early childhood development research, it is clear that this body of knowledge supports and depends on good public policy - an area where we can do much better: "As different programs for young children and their families have evolved along parallel pathways, the science of early childhood development and its underlying neurobiology has generated a deeper understanding of the common foundations of learning, behavior, and lifelong health. Drawing on this converging knowledge, entrepreneurial policymakers have invested considerable energy in attempting to reduce the persistent fragmentation that separates services across sectors. Despite these important efforts, however, the full range of supports provided for families with young children continues to struggle with inconsistencies in implementation, inefficiencies in delivery, and occasional conflicts with scientific knowledge (2)."

Senate Bill 526 and the Family Connects® model will allow the State of Oregon and individual communities to more efficiently implement support services. This step is critical in helping all newborns in Oregon have their best shot at being healthy, happy adults later down the road. I strongly encourage the committee to vote in favor of Senate Bill 526, and would be happy to provide additional testimony or answer any questions via email.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Fisher', with a stylized, cursive script.

Philip A. Fisher, Ph.D.
Philip H. Knight Chair and Professor of Psychology
Director, Center for Translational Neuroscience

(1), (2): Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>