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January 25, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Health Care

From: Elena Rivera, Senior Health Policy & Program Advisor, Children's
Institute

Re: In support of SB 526 to fund universal home visiting

Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Elena Rivera, and I am the Senior Health Policy & Program Advisor for the Children's Institute. Children's Institute's mission is to ensure every child in Oregon is prepared for school and life. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of a state investment in universal home visiting for families of newborns. Children's Institute champions early investments in kids and families from prenatal to age eight to boost education and health outcomes for all of Oregon's children.

The importance of the first 1,000 days

We now know that children experience their most profound cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth in the first few years of life. By the time children reach their third birthday, their brains are 80 percent developed. The quality of children's early experiences during this crucial period of growth sets the foundation for all future learning and lifelong health. When young children live in stable and healthy environments, have nurturing caregivers, and access the preventive health services they need, they are more likely to be healthy and developmentally on-track, which sets them on a trajectory of success.

The impact of universal home visiting

Offering voluntary home visits to all parents of newborns soon after birth is a highly impactful health promotion intervention. The program would match skilled public health nurses with families of newborns to offer parents resources, information, and tools that promote maternal and child health, strengthen parent-child relationships, and ensure families are connected to any additional supports they may need.

The proposed universal home visiting model that Oregon is considering has been implemented in other communities across the nation, and multiple rigorous evaluations have demonstrated its impressive benefits. Families who access the home visits have greater connections to community resources, higher-quality parenting behavior, increased utilization of preventive health care, improved maternal mental health, and enhanced home environments that foster early learning.^{i, ii} In addition to these child and family outcomes, the program yields a

significant return on investment, with every dollar invested in the program returning over three dollars in reduced emergency care costs alone.ⁱⁱⁱ

Universal, voluntary nurse home visiting is an effective approach to prevent and reduce adverse childhood experiences and improve lifelong health, education, and economic outcomes, thereby saving the state millions in costly interventions later down the road and promoting a healthy and productive workforce.^{iv}

Universal home visiting is a critical missing piece of Oregon's early childhood system

Oregon has invested state dollars to fund home visiting services that are targeted to families with identified risks and needs. There has been substantial progress toward ensuring that these home visiting services are effective and well-coordinated across the state. At the same time, we know that those programs are only reaching a small fraction of families who could benefit from support.

The universal home visiting program under consideration is not duplicative, but rather would enhance Oregon's existing landscape of early childhood and family support services. Universal home visiting would have a far greater reach as a population health intervention accessible to all families with newborns and would also help identify and seamlessly connect families who need more intensive services to those programs that our state offers.

Invest in universal home visiting

The outcomes and impact of universal home visiting speak for themselves. A state investment in this effective program has the potential to improve health and learning outcomes for children and families across Oregon. This is exactly the kind of investment in Oregon's future that should be a top priority as we seek to disrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty and create a thriving Oregon. I urge the committee to invest in universal home visiting.

ⁱ Dodge, Kenneth A. et al. Implementation and Randomized Controlled Trial Evaluation Universal Postnatal Nurse Home Visiting. <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301361>

ⁱⁱ Dodge, Kenneth A. et al. Randomized Controlled Trial of Universal Postnatal Nurse Home Visiting: Impact on Emergency Care. http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/132/Supplement_2/S140.long

ⁱⁱⁱ Duke Today. Nurse Home Visits For Infants Save Money. <https://today.duke.edu/2013/12/homevisit>

^{iv} Oregon Health Authority. Building Resiliency: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences. <https://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyPeopleFamilies/DataReports/Documents/OregonACEsReport.pdf>