

My name is Mary Arthur-Young. I have a Masters in Social Work and have been working in the field of children's mental health in the state of Oregon on and off since 1996. My early jobs were on the treatment end of things - working with families struggling to reunite following separation in the foster care system and with families of school aged children with severe behavioral and emotional issues. My final 6 years were spent working for the Healthy Families of Oregon Program of Linn and Benton Counties, first as a Home Visitor and then as a supervisor of other Home Visitors. Since retiring for family medical reasons in 2018, I have served on their volunteer Advisory Board.

Today I write to you in support of the Early Childhood Coalition's agenda, including a \$127 million increase to the funding for Early Learning programs, and specifically an increase of \$10 million to the next biennial budget for the Healthy Families of Oregon (HFO) program. As a mental health professional who has worked in many different communities and professional settings over my 20+ years career, I can state unequivocally that HFO is one of the most cost effective investments you could make to improve the lives of all Oregonians.

I say this because the research is clear: programs that foster increased healthy attachment between children and their caregivers and improve their access to appropriate health information and brain development activities in the first 3 years of life improve school readiness and decrease child abuse, health disparities and intergenerational poverty. While there are several different early childhood prevention type programs operating in the state, what makes the HFO model unique is that all of its services are grounded in evidence-based best practices, which means they've been scientifically proven to be the most effective ways to achieve desired outcomes. Additionally, the staff is required to keep extensive data for the purpose of tracking progress toward these outcomes in real time and share this data with the state agency on a routine timetable. There is no guesswork re whether the taxpayers' dollars are being put to the desired use. You can literally see the impact if you look at their quarterly reports.

The other thing that makes HFO a uniquely effective program is that it not only targets developing the child, but additionally works on teaching goal setting and building resilience in the adult caregivers. This is why it not only increases school readiness but also improves family functioning, which then ultimately decreases families' dependence on other expensive social safety net programs. That's a lot of bang for the buck as they say!

To accomplish all of this amazing work however, HFO needs this additional funding to create a new statewide database for tracking this critical data. They've been attempting to function without one for the last 5 years, with individual programs wasting valuable staff time on developing their own separate ways to track required information. Additionally, they need to increase salaries to bring them up to levels more comparable to other early childhood partners in the state who've been granted increased funding in previous years. This is the only way HFO can continue to attract the kind of highly skilled and dedicated professionals it takes to make their services effective. In recent years, Healthy Families of Linn and Benton Counties has particularly struggled to attract an adequate number of bi-lingual Home Visitors, despite a growing number of Latinx families in the region, as there are other employers who can offer much higher wages.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mary Arthur-Young, MSW