

#### HFO ORAL TESTIMONY FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 4

Good evening members of the Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am Jessica Baker, a Healthy Families Oregon Program Manager in Corvallis. I am speaking today on behalf of Healthy Families Oregon's home visiting programs in Linn/Benton, Lane, Douglas, and Jackson Counties. We ask that you support the Early Childhood Coalition's agenda for a \$127 million increase to fund Early Learning programs to advance racial equity, expand early childhood investments, and strengthen the childcare system for working families. Within this broader systems investment, we want to share how critical it is to increase the biennial budget of the Healthy Families Oregon (HFO) program by \$10 million.

Over the past 28 years, Healthy Families Oregon has provided evidence-based home visiting services for families who have children prenatal to age 3, which is a critical time when most brain development occurs and when both opportunity and risk are the highest. Healthy Families Oregon helps parents develop a strong foundation for their young children to lead healthy lives. This proven home-visiting program guides and builds parenting skills that reduce child abuse and neglect, increase school readiness, decrease health disparities, and reduce intergenerational poverty. Throughout Oregon, HFO continues to serve over 2,000 families annually, and nearly half of whom are families of color.

Healthy Families' home visitors have the honor of working with families who ask for help in the earliest days of their children's lives. HFO programs are designed to serve Oregon's families who want help to ensure that their children have the emotional security that comes from consistent, nurturing parenting. They are seeking help to give their children the best chance at reaching their full potential. As parents, they are courageous enough to invite Healthy Families Oregon into their lives and deserve our services, and that is why a \$10 million budget increase this biennium is critical to ensuring the well-being of Oregon's youngest children and their families.

We are grateful that in recent years the Oregon Legislature provided mandates and funding for higher wages for several of our early childhood partners, and now we hope to join them as professionals worthy of competitive, livable wages. As employers of dedicated early childhood professionals, we must increase compensation to remain competitive.

Additionally, Healthy Families Oregon programs are also in need of a statewide database that would allow local programs to collect accurate and meaningful data that would allow our programs to better serve our communities, engage BIPOC, and other underrepresented communities. Over the past 5 years, our programs have been without a functioning database, yet one is desperately needed to ensure we are reaching those that need our services the most.

Increasing the Healthy Families Oregon budget will support our efforts to continue serving 2,000 families, plus an additional 600 deserving, qualified families. Your support for the Early Childhood Coalition's agenda that calls for increasing early learning investments by \$127 million will more broadly advance racial equity and expand the investment in early childhood. Investing in young children is an investment in Oregon's future.

On behalf of the Healthy Families Oregon, programs in Linn/Benton, Lane, Douglas, and Jackson County thank you for your service and your time today.

Jessica Baker, Linn/Benton County  
Sarah Closser, Lane County  
Colleen May, Douglas County  
Jacque Doney, Jackson County