

Chair Lew Frederick, Chair Susan McLain

Members of the Joint Interim on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education

I am Colleen May the Regional Program Manager for Healthy Families Oregon for Douglas, Klamath and Lake Counties. I am speaking today on behalf of the Healthy Families Oregon programs in District 2 and 4.

We ask that you support the Early Childhood Coalition's agenda of \$127 million increase to Early Learning programs to advance racial equity, expand early childhood investments, and strengthen the childcare system. Within this broader systems investment, I want to share how critical it is to increase the biennial budget of the Healthy Families Oregon (HFO) program by \$10 million.

Healthy Families Oregon is an evidenced based program that helps families build early nurturing relationships, which is the foundation for healthy development and lifelong well-being. We support parents to become confident in their parenting skills and knowledge. They gain new insights on how to encourage language and intellectual growth, as well as physical and social-emotional skills in their child. With our families we identify stressors, develop coping skills and support systems. By supporting our highest of risk families, we are increases parenting skills, increases school readiness, decreasing health disparities and preventing child abuse and neglect within our communities around Oregon through family-focused and empathic support provided in the home.

Healthy Families Oregon works with families who have children prenatal to age 3, during the time when most brain development occurs and when both

opportunity and risk are the highest. Our Family Support Specialist, help parents and families give their child the best chance at reaching their full potential. We continue to serve over 2,000 families annually throughout the state.

Now, more than ever, home visiting is an essential service for families. Parents that were already struggling to meet the basic needs of care for their children (food, health care, shelter and education) are struggling even more. Through, social distancing already marginalized and isolated families have lost many of their stabilizing support systems; family, friends, schools, community resources, faith organizations. Social isolation and families living in cramped conditions can lead to increases in domestic violence and child maltreatment.

Our Family Support Specialist, are helping mitigate these situations by continuing to reach out to families through outdoor visits, phone calls, virtual visits, deliveries of curriculum, and activities for families to do together, provide resources and information to help stabilize our families lives and reduce the fallout on their children.

We are grateful that in recent years the Legislature provided mandates and funding for higher wages for several other early childhood programs, recognizing them as professionals worthy of competitive, livable wages. Unfortunately, Healthy Families Oregon funding has not kept up. With wages lower than other early childhood programs, it has made it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff. To remain competitive employers of early childhood professionals, we must and need increases in staff compensation.

Increasing the Healthy Families Oregon budget will help us do that. Increasing the Healthy Families Oregon budget will be an investment in young children and investing in young children is investing in the future.

On behalf of the all the Healthy Families Oregon Programs in District 2 and 4, thank you for your service and for your time today.

*Colleen May*

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