

Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee  
Testimony – HB 5013  
March 2, 2023

Good morning Chairs Fredrick and McLane and members of the Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee. For the record, my name is Laura Aaland.

I am the Healthy Families Oregon (HFO) Eligibility Screener and Family Support Specialist for Healthy Families of the High Desert in Central Oregon.

As a voluntary statewide accredited home visiting program for families pre-natal to age 3, Healthy Families Oregon has been serving families for over 30 years starting in 1992. I personally, have been with the program for over 20 years and have witnessed firsthand the potential our program has to enrich the lives of the families that we serve.

*Healthy Families of the High Desert serves some of the highest risk families in our community. We work to mitigate adverse childhood experiences and change the trajectory and quality of life for these families. This work can be very challenging due to the population that we serve and it is important to have highly trained staff in order to be effective. Unfortunately, due to the increased cost of living, that everyone is feeling, we have not been able to pay our staff a living wage. Some of us, myself included, must work 2 jobs to make ends meet. This is not sustainable. I would like to really stress the importance of the work that we do. We are part of breaking cycles, of abuse and neglect, connecting families to mental health services, identifying early developmental delays, reducing stressors in the home, and helping families meet their goals. We do this through first building a relationship of trust with the families. If home visitors continue to leave due to the inability to make a living wage, we then also, break that trust with the families that we worked so hard with to build, and ask them to accept a new home visitor into their home, and into their lives.*

*I'd like to share a quote from a family that our program served 3 years ago, and just reached out asking to come back to our program. This mom suffered from drug addiction, as did her parents. "To be perfectly honest when we were working with you-you were kinda my rock and just your support and help changed our lives more than I can explain. We've done pretty good but if you kinda remember my family has never really been that much support and right now raising two kids I just could really use your help and guidance if it was possible."*

Unfortunately, our program serves less than 20 percent of those families qualifying for and requesting services.

It is an exciting time for Oregon. It is not often that a new agency is created in a state. Now, at the start-up of the agency is when the right size investments should be made for its success and for the success of Oregon's families. While we support the investments the Governor has made in her budget for the new Department of Early Learning and Care, there are still investments that need to be made over and above the GRB.

1. We respectfully ask for a \$15M increase in the DELC budget for Healthy Families Oregon to:
  - a. Increase salaries to a level that is in line with other early learning programs and provides stability in retention of staff .(\$2.3M pay parity left out of the GRB from 2023 increase, \$10M for additional pay increases)
  - b. Purchase a database system (\$800,000) as required for program integrity and accreditation.
  - c. Increase present HFO state staffing by at least 4 new positions (\$1M) to come closer to the levels needed for a program of this size and.
  - d. Provide funding for HFO to open in Lincoln County (\$1.2M).

Now is the time for the leaders of this state to rise to this moment and fund the agency, supply the tools and staff, and to fund the DELC programs at the levels necessary to serve those most at need in our state. By funding early childhood programs, families will thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Laura Aaland  
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Bend Oregon