



Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee
Testimony – HB 5506
April 11, 2023

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

I am the Healthy Families Oregon (HFO) Regional Program Manager for Douglas, Klamath and Lakes counties for United Community Action Network (UCAN)

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.

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. By supporting our highest of risk families, we increase parenting skills, increase school readiness, decrease health disparities and prevent child abuse and neglect within our communities through family-focused and empathic support provided in the home. The return on the investment for Healthy Families is for every dollar invested there is a return of \$1.46 and for families involved in child welfare the return rises to \$3.16.*

Unfortunately, Present salaries with in the GRB still puts the program below what other early childhood programs are at and is even below the level of other similar jobs. At a minimum, HFO staff still need an additional \$10M to obtain pay parity. Over the past 3 years, many programs, including ours, has struggled to recruit and retain qualified staff due to the lack of competitive wages. When we lose staff we lose families, high risk families. It takes funding and time to recruit and train a new Family Support Specialist. Unfortunately, due to the low base pay we are unable to attract staff to even fill positions, with some position being open for over a year.

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. Investing in families and young children is investing in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

CC: Joint Ways & Means Chairs Senator Steiner and Representative Sanchez
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education
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Representative David Gomberg
Representative Greg Smith
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Senator Dick Anderson
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Representative Khanh Pham
Representative E. Werner Reschke
Representative Andrea Valderrama



*Return on Investment Healthy Families America Brief

<https://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HFA-ROI-Brief.pdf>