

Submitter: Shannon Armstrong

On Behalf Of Eastern Oregon Healthy Families

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Measure: SB 5506

Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee Testimony – HB 5506 April 28th, 2023

Good Evening, Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members of the Joint Ways & Means.

For the record, my name is Shannon Armstrong. I am the Program Manager for Eastern Oregon Healthy Families as part of the state-wide system of Healthy Families, serving Baker and Malheur Counties.

As a voluntary statewide accredited home visiting program for families pre-natal to age 5.

Healthy Families Oregon is now in its 30th year serving Oregon families! Healthy Families is one of Oregon's first child abuse prevention program, starting services back in 1992. Eastern Oregon Healthy Families is one of Oregon's rural and frontier regional sites. Malheur County has the highest poverty rate in the state. According to the 2021 Census Bureau, 20% of Malheur County lives below the poverty line. Malheur County has 332 founded incidences of child abuse and neglect, and Baker has 77. Malheur County has the third highest victim rate in the state at 29.8 per 1000 children and the highest rate in the state of children living in Foster Care. Baker County has a 21.4 per 1000 Eastern Oregon Healthy Families is the first site in the State to be part of Healthy Families Child Welfare Protocols. Due to identified risks in Malheur County and Oregon, Eastern Oregon Healthy Families has had 100% screened families qualified for the Healthy Families program.

Healthy Families has an extensive evidence model that strives to build healthy relationships with increasing bonding and attachment with parents and children through early learning activities through a trauma-informed and educational approach. Healthy Families partners with families and helps them connect to the community, such as housing, education, food, classes, and more. Goal setting and case management across identified risk factors for families to help build resilience and growth among families.

Due to the nature of this position, there is a high turnover rate with increased stress (67% turnover rate in 2022) in all positions within our local program. An increase is needed for pay parity and equity. Present salaries within the Early Childhood budget put the program below what other early childhood programs are paid for similar jobs. At a minimum, HFO staff still need an additional \$10M to obtain pay parity, retain current staff and increase the number of families served in Malheur and Baker County. Yet, even though the program has a 100% positive screen rate, the Eastern Oregon Healthy Families program helps less than 20 percent of those families qualifying for and requesting services.

It is an exciting time for Oregon. A new agency is rarely created in a state. Now, at the Department of Early Learning and Care start-up, the right size investments should be made for its success and for the success of Oregon's families. While we support the assets in the current budget for the new Department

of Early Learning and Care, investments still need to be made over and above to stabilize services for Oregon's neediest families.

We respectfully ask for a \$10M increase in the budget for Healthy Families Oregon to:

1. Increase salaries to a level that aligns with other early learning programs and provides stability in staff retention. (\$2M pay parity left out of the GRB from the 2023 increase, \$5M for additional pay increases)
2. Purchase a database system (\$800,000) as required for program integrity and accreditation, which has not existed for eight years.
3. Increase present HFO state staffing by at least four new positions (\$1M) to reach the levels needed for a program of this size.
4. 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 fund the DELC programs at the levels necessary to serve those most in need in our state by setting a foundation for supporting early childhood programs, all families not just Malheur and Baker County will thrive.

Thank you for your time and Consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Armstrong', with a stylized, cursive script.

Shannon Armstrong