

April 3, 2025

Dear Chairs Valderrama and Campos, and Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Human Services,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to share my heartfelt support for Oregon's Regional Family Networks, specifically to highlight the significant impact that Families Connected/Familias en Conexión, the Regional Family Network serving Lane County, has had on my family's life.

Families Connected/Familias en Conexión is a family-led organization that provides invaluable support to parents raising children with intellectual and developmental disabilities across Lane County. As a parent, I've witnessed firsthand how their work transforms lives by offering information, resources, and culturally responsive support. They truly meet families where they are, no matter where they live in our expansive county.

In 2023-2024 alone, Families Connected/Familias en Conexión made a lasting difference by:

- Supporting more than 1,055 families
- Hosting 134 parent trainings and family events, reaching a total of 8,796 people
- Partnering with 365 community organizations

For many families raising children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, especially those in rural and Latinx communities, the barriers can feel overwhelming. But Families Connected/Familias en Conexión is there to help break down those barriers, providing culturally grounded, bilingual support that is so deeply needed. Here are just a few of the ways they make a difference:

- They host accessible, neurodiversity-affirming family events, like the biannual Strength in Neurodiversity festivals, which celebrate and embrace our children's unique strengths.
- They create Sensory Zones at community events, helping reduce feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of belonging for all families.
- Their disability awareness trainings have been a resource for local schools, faith-based institutions, and community partners, helping to build a more inclusive society.
- Most importantly, they empower families by providing skill-building trainings that give parents the tools to advocate for their children and plan for a positive future, both educationally and in life.

I've seen firsthand how the Regional Family Networks provide essential lifelines for families like mine. These networks are more than just services—they are beacons of hope. They reduce isolation, strengthen family resilience, and offer a sense of direction during what can often feel like an uncertain journey.

Thank you for your time and for considering the continued support of these invaluable services. They have made a profound difference in the lives of so many families, including my own.

I wanted to take a moment to share my personal experience with the Family Network, a program that has been such an integral part of my life for over eight years, seven of which I've spent serving as the Program Manager.

It's been incredibly rewarding to support families in so many ways, but what truly makes this work meaningful to me is that I get to do it while also supporting my son. The Family Network has given me the unique opportunity to bring him along to many of the events and trainings I facilitate. He loves attending, and I can see the joy it brings him to see his friends and enjoy the welcoming, inclusive atmosphere of these gatherings. It's a space where he feels safe, valued, and connected—and I feel the same.

In addition to offering support to others, my son and I are direct beneficiaries of the resources and trainings provided by the Family Network. I can honestly say that both of our lives have been enriched because of the program. The growth and positive impact we've experienced wouldn't have been possible without this amazing network.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be part of this program and to see how it continues to support families like mine.

Warmly,

Nancy Berge

541-606-7175 Sincerely,

Nancy Berge

541-606-7175