



**Washington County
Commission on Children and Families**

155 N. First Ave. MS 6
Hillsboro, OR 97124

william_thomas@co.washington.or.us
503-380-1665

**JOINT WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Testimony on HB 2091A – April 17, 2013
William Thomas, Washington County Department of Health and Human Services**

Co-Chairs Bates and Nathanson and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is William Thomas. I am testifying on behalf of the Washington County Department of Health and Human Services as Director of our Commission on Children and Families, and on behalf of the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network as Board President.

We support repealing the private health insurance options in Healthy Kids including Healthy Kids Connect, and transitioning children enrolled in these options to the Oregon Health Plan by increasing Medical Assistance Program eligibility to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This plan both will achieve savings for the state and be better for families with incomes between 200-300% of FPL, by reducing financial pressures and providing more comprehensive insurance. We urge the Committee to fully fund HB 2091A and send it to both floors with a Do Pass.

For the past three years our County has coordinated a countywide outreach program to assist families of eligible children and youth in completing applications for enrollment under Oregon's Healthy Kids programs, including Healthy Kids Connect. During this period the Commission and its partners have employed bilingual and bicultural outreach workers based in the Family Resource Centers that serve Washington County's seven school districts. This school-based outreach strategy has proven to be very successful in assisting hard-to reach families, as our workers have assisted literally thousands of eligible children and youth to enroll in Healthy Kids.

Only a small percentage (about 4%) of families assisted by Washington County's Healthy Kids outreach workers have been eligible for Healthy Kids Connect. While most of these eligible families completed their enrollment applications, about one-fifth choose not to sign up, either because they couldn't afford to make even low-cost insurance payments given their other living expenses, or they were overwhelmed by the additional paperwork and were unwilling to apply.

I have attached testimony by Evan Weaver, Coordinator for our Hillsboro Family Resource Center. Based on feedback provided by eligible families and outreach workers, he identifies two chief obstacles to enrolling families in Healthy Kids Connect, as: "1) The tiered structure of Healthy Kids made explanation cumbersome and unintuitive; and 2) Many eligible families are unaccustomed to their status as possible recipients of government benefits and thus were more likely to ignore messaging or resist engagement by outreach workers."

Mr. Weaver's observations are perhaps more meaningful by the fact that his own family recently became eligible for Healthy Kids Connect. He believes that by increasing eligibility to 300% of FPL, the state will be better able to reach families like his own who are facing poverty for the first time, and will reduce the barriers that have limited program participation for these families.

Evan Weaver
451 SE Walnut St.
Hillsboro, OR 97123
April 16, 2013

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
Co-Chairs Sen. Bates and Rep. Nathanson
900 Court St. NE
HR F
Salem, Oregon 97301

Distinguished Senators and Representatives,

I, Evan Weaver on behalf of the non-profit organization Youth Contact, am writing in support of HB 2091A. During my tenure as the Coordinator for the Hillsboro Family Resource Center I have had the privilege to witness the successes of the Healthy Kids program. My organization has aided over 1,000 families apply for the health insurance since the inception of Healthy Kids outreach grants in 2010. The program has done an immeasurable service in Washington County and brought unprecedented levels of healthcare to our most vulnerable citizens - children.

However, there is one area which has been a source of consternation both to Oregon families and my office's outreach workers. The Healthy Kids Connect program, while serving an important population, has largely been underutilized by families in Washington County. In the past year and a half only 4% of families who we assisted with Healthy Kids applications qualified for Healthy Kids Connect. While the vast majority families did decide to pursue Healthy Kids Connect, the lack of high enrollment numbers cannot be ignored.

From feedback given by eligible families and outreach workers, there are two chief obstacles to enrolling families in the Healthy Kids Connect program:

1. The tiered structure of Healthy Kids made explanation cumbersome and unintuitive
2. Many eligible families are unaccustomed to their status as possible recipients of government benefits and thus were more likely to ignore messaging or resist engagement by outreach workers.

I can personally testify to the latter. My spouse and I, in many ways, exemplify the target population. We both hold advanced degrees, professional work histories, and our only experience with government support is federal student loans. However, with my wife unable to find work and the arrival of our first child imminent, some form of aid was desperately needed.

The Healthy Kids connect program delivered such critical financial relief. I am certain it was only my intimate knowledge with the program that led me to apply. Many families of similar professional and economic stature are facing poverty for the first time in their lives. These are the types of families whom Healthy Kids Connect could most benefit. By increasing the eligibility for Healthy Kids to 300% FPL we will be able to better court this audience and break barriers which were limiting program participation.

Sincerely,

Evan Weaver
HFRC Program Coordinator