

To: Ways and Means Education Subcommittee Members
From: AJ, Parent, Next Door, Inc.
Date: March 11th, 2015
Re: House Bill 5016

Co-Chairs Senator Monroe and Representative Komp, Members of the Committee,

When I first found out that I was pregnant, I was so scared. I was only 15 years old and a freshman in High School. I knew I had to tell my dad. When I finally told him, my dad said that I needed to put the baby up for adoption. You see, I have never met my mother, and have been raised by my single father. He knew how difficult it was to be a single parent. I was so scared about having a baby, but more scared to give my baby up for adoption. What was I going to do? Who would be able to help me? I don't have a mother, so who would show me how to be a mother?

I knew nothing about how to care for a baby. I have never been around babies and since I have no mother to model from, or to help guide me along the way, I was very overwhelmed. My dad and I decided we would keep the baby, stay in school and graduate, and we would find whatever services and support for a teen parent that we could. So, when a lady at school told me someone was coming to talk to me from New Parent Services (Healthy Families), I was both relieved, but also afraid to talk to a stranger. Two women came to see me at school and brought me a welcome baby gift- I felt better because I knew they had a lot of experience helping teen parents like me. I now had a home visitor who was going to walk beside me and my baby through my pregnancy and until my baby turned three years old! This made my dad feel better because he knew I would have support and guidance from a woman who was also a mother, and someone with experience working with a new teenage mom.

My home visitor has helped me through a lot of challenges. In the beginning with a new born baby, she taught me what my baby needed, how to support his development, how to keep him safe, and how to support him through all the milestones of crawling, walking, learning to say words. Now with a toddler, I am learning positive ways to discipline my son (teaching him), and ways to help him learn more. We do fun activities on the visits, and our home visitor brings information for me to learn about what is happening with my son's development, and we complete the "Ages and Stages" questionnaire to make sure his development is on track. On top of all the things I have been learning about my son, my home visitor also has been a big support to me with my school, life goals, hardships, and a support when I have felt judgment by others because I am so young. She has made me feel strong and encourages me to be proud of my accomplishments and helps me through difficult times when I need to try something new, or make changes.

I am proud of how much I have accomplished since becoming my son's mom! I held true to my word to my dad that I would stay in school. I am on track for graduation, with my class! And I will be very happy when I am walking down the aisle to graduate with my 2 ½ year old son walking right beside me!