

Testimony for Ways & Means Education Subcommittee

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Good Morning. My name is *Suey Linzmeier* and I am an Early Learning advocate from Yamhill County. I am the Executive Director of Head Start of Yamhill County, a Board member of the Yamhill Community Care Organization, and a co-chair of the Yamhill Early Learning Council. I have been involved in the field of early learning since 1980, when science was trying to figure out if nature or nurturing was responsible for children's success. Thanks to the extensive brain research in the last 20 years, we know that growth comes from both nature and from nurturing. For a baby's brain to make connections, she must be healthy and have what she needs physically. If that happens, some changes will come naturally. But that is not enough. She must also be in a place that gives her experiences, and with people she can be lovingly attached with. Nature and nurture together help her make brain connections and make the connections strong. Our goal is for all children and their families to receive the nurturing to support a strong foundation for life and learning in Yamhill and across the state.

I am here today representing the many organizations and individuals who support and are involved in Early Learning in Yamhill County. We estimate that there are over 11,000 children in our community ages birth through 8 who all deserve quality early learning opportunities to develop solid foundations for school- and life-readiness. Of those children, 57% live in poverty and 32% are children of color; two of the demographics that we know negatively impact successful completion of third grade reading comprehension assessments.

Yamhill experiences some of the highest poverty and the lowest kindergarten assessment rates in the state. I am here today to ask you to support the early learning funding package proposed in the Governor's budget to help communities across Oregon to develop strong, coordinated systems which will lead to better outcomes for Oregon's young children and families.

In our community, we know that only a small number of children are receiving quality early learning experiences due to accessibility and affordability. These include: kids in Head Start whose families income is at or below 100% of the poverty line; children with diagnosed disabilities; children who have been referred from their pediatrician or a neighbor concerned about their welfare or safety to home visiting services with Public Health, Healthy Families or our Relief Nursery; and children whose families can afford a high-quality preschool or child care programs. Very few families receive employment-related day care assistance funding in Yamhill.

Twenty years ago I told legislators that for every dollar spent on the early years, it was an investment that saved society \$7 in costs associated with the legal, judicial, health care, and welfare systems. Thanks to inflation, that savings is now up to \$10 for every dollar spent to support early learning. These are very exciting times for those of us who are champions for young children and young families; I hope that we can count on you to be the champions for this next generation of Oregonians who are fortunate to grow up in this state. We have accomplished a lot in our community through partnerships with health care, business, libraries, community government, non-profits, and the faith community; but we still rely on state funding to help us create these systems and programs that support thriving families and a strong start for every child.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

What We Know: Families thrive when protective factors are robust in their lives and communities.

Using the Strengthening Families Approach, more than 30 states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states and counties also use the Protective Factors Framework to align services for children and families, strengthen families in the child welfare system and work in partnership with families and communities to build protective factors. For more information and many tools and options for implementation, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by national partner organizations including:

- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- The Finance Project
- FRIENDS National Resource Center
- The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
- Parents As Teachers
- United Way Worldwide
- ZERO TO THREE

The Protective Factors Framework

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also "promotive" factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent's capacity for resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family's life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to "give back", an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members as well as parent education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

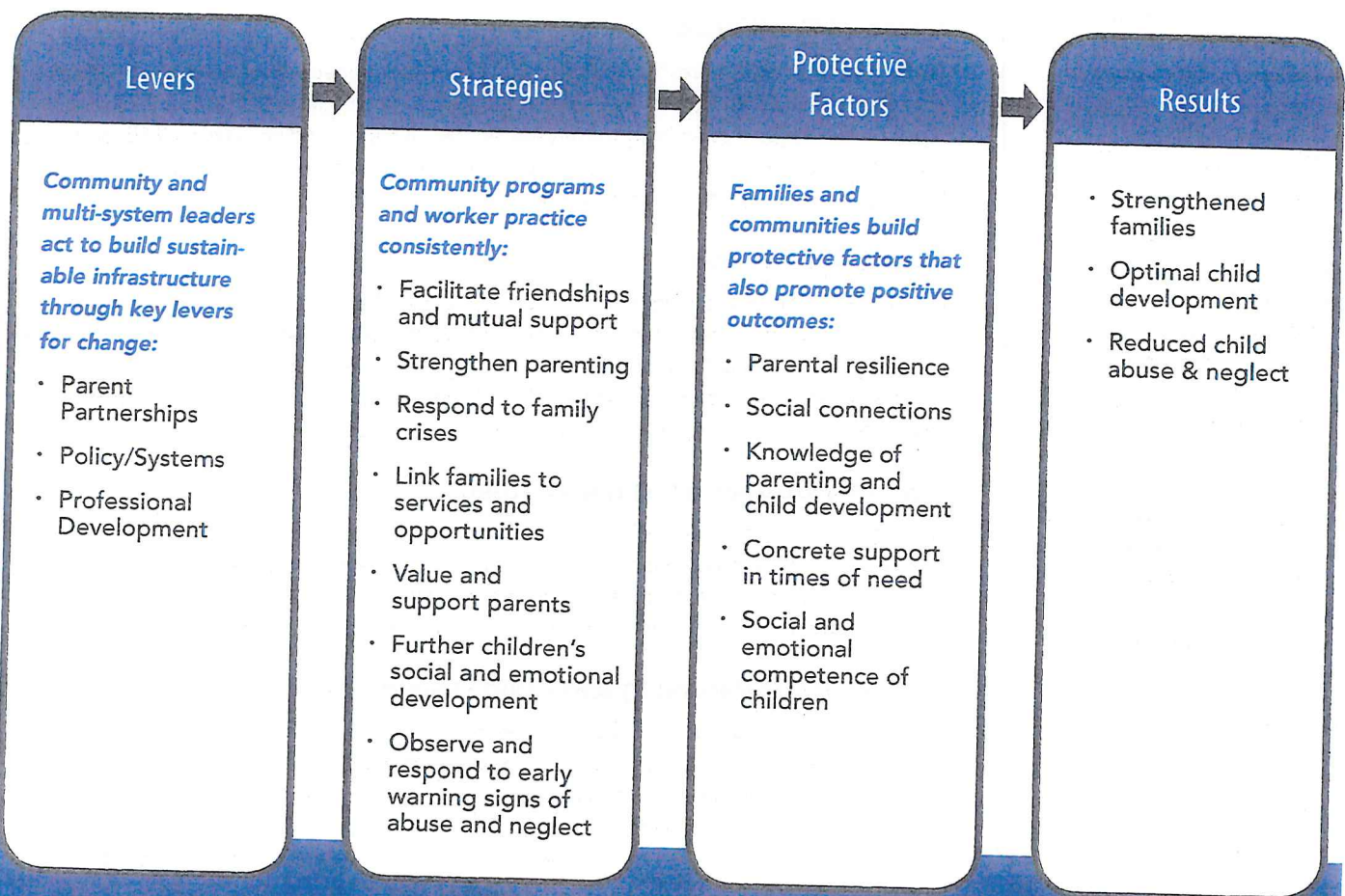
Social and Emotional Competence of Children

A child or youth's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.

Mobilizing partners, communities and families
to build family strengths, promote optimal
development and reduce child abuse and neglect

The Strengthening Families Approach

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



A New Vision

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for all children, youth and families
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families