



Submitted Testimony
Oregon State Senate Health Care Committee
SB 526
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Capitol Building, Salem, OR

Submission Participant for the record:

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Chair Monnes Anderson and members of the Committee, my name is Martha Brooks. I am the State Director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation, which are bi-partisan, non-profit organizations of senior law enforcement officials and business leaders with more than 200 members in Oregon. Our law enforcement members believe criminals must be put behind bars, but they are also dedicated to preventing crime by investing in proven programs that get kids started on the right track in life. Our business leaders yearn for a viable educated work force. Through investments in early childhood programs such as home visiting, both the members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation get what they want. And you, as public servants and guardians of the taxpayers' money, make wise investments.

I am writing on behalf of the members to inform you of our support of Universal Home Visiting and Family Connects.

We all have a commitment to do the very best we can for our kids and make investments go as far as possible. One of those investments would be a program that supports parents at the very earliest time of a child's life. Universal Home Visiting through Family Connects does just that. This evidence based, voluntary home visiting model based on Durham Connects, provides new parents with 2-3 home visits within the first couple of months after birth to help parents get started. A nurse connects with the parents to see if they have any concerns, need help or referrals to other supports for their baby or themselves. For example, is mom having trouble lactating, is baby doing well and gaining weight or sleeping well, is mom experiencing difficulty such as post-partum depression and what do they need? If things are going well, then reassure both mom and dad they are doing just fine as new parents.

And why should we consider Family connects? Consider these fact.

- 80-90% of brain development happens between zero and age 5 and the majority of that development is between zero and 3.

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- According to the 2017 Oregon Child Welfare Data Book, nearly 50% of all child abuse and neglect cases in Oregon happen between zero and 5 (45.1%).
- Of the nearly 50% of Oregon's child abuse and neglect cases, the highest number are children below age 1 at 1,369 (12.4%). Another way to look at this is that over 3% of all births in Oregon are abused and/or neglected before their first birthday.
- Yearly, approximately 45,000 babies are born in Oregon, yet we serve less than 20% of the 135,000 kids age zero to 3 eligible for home visiting.
- New parents struggle the most and yet we wait until later to offer many services.
- And yes, quality counts and is critical to success.

Why wait? We shouldn't.

- Family Connects shows that these services have several benefits. Among them are:
 - Reduced emergency medical care for infants by as much as 37%,
 - A rate of return for every dollar spent there is over a \$3 return in reduced emergency medical costs.
- Based on spending of \$2.2M annually for approx. 3,200 births, that is a return of approximately \$47M in the first two years of a baby's life.
- The ROI does not include other costs savings such as child welfare, the criminal justice system, and other health care services.
- Family Connects can:
 - Increase positive infant health,
 - Improve the quality of parenting,
 - Improved parent mental health,
 - Reduced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).
- Early is where we get the biggest bang for the buck.
- Decrease the absenteeism of parents from their jobs.

What I can tell you is that investments early can solve a lot of social and emotional problems with kids, and investments early can pay back dividends at all ages – not just age 3 or 6 or 18 or 21, but well into adult life. Without a foundation and supports children and families stumble again and again. If Oregon wants to reduce the numbers of child abuse and neglect, increase school readiness, increase the health of young children and their parents, reduce social services, this is where Oregon should invest. If we don't get it right at the start, it costs more; takes longer and sometimes, the damage cannot be un-done.

Family Connects is a logical and missing piece in Oregon's home visiting system that can fill a gap in services. The program does not replace any of the existing and longer-term home visiting services Oregon has, but augments and supports them. Family Connects can help identify and refer families to other services the family may request that can include Healthy Families Oregon, Early Head Start, Babies First!, CaCoon, TANF, SNAP, WIC, health and mental health care professionals and more.

Face it. Parenting is hard for everyone. While every family may not want a parent coach, many do. We owe it to those families who want supports to offer them. And the benefits of



offering this program will pay back enormously. Offering a voluntary home visiting program with a light touch that costs on average between \$500-\$700 per family will go a long way to building stronger families, reducing more expensive costs to the state, reduce the strain on our judicial system, and increase a ready willing and able workforce – both now and in the future.

I worry about our children and I know you do too. One way to reduce that worry is to **implement Universal Home Visiting in Oregon.**

Thank you.