



March 6, 2019

Testimony in support of \$2M Healthy Families Oregon Funding in HB 5015

Dear Co Chairs Frederick and McLain, members of the Subcommittee on Education,

My name is Pamela Heisler. I am the Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse Oregon- a newly formed chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. **I'm writing today in support of a minimum investment of \$2M in the evidence-based home visiting program, Healthy Families Oregon.**

When I was born, my mother was a single parent with a 4-year old and a fractured spine who lived 3 hours from the hospital by bus. I weighed 2 pounds and 15oz. My mother struggled to care for my sister and I in the face of enormous physical, mental health, and economic obstacles. When she brought me home from the hospital after nearly three months, she was on her own, having recently left a marriage full of domestic violence. There's no happy ending to this story- she struggled for her entire life, her children were placed in foster care, and her physical and mental health only deteriorated.

I share this story because I believe her story, my families' story, could have ended differently if she had the life changing support of a home visiting program. Healthy Families Oregon (HFO), which provides weekly home visits for at least the first six months after a child's birth, helps parents develop more positive beliefs about their role as parents and connects families to the supports and services they need to be successful. When enrolled prenatally, the program is proven to improve birth outcomes, including low birth weight. HFO is designed for parents facing challenges, just like my mother: single parenthood; childhood history of abuse, mental health issues, and domestic violence.

These challenges make it all the more important that the individuals doing the home visits have special certification. Training requirements for HFO staff assure a knowledgeable and well-informed workforce with a focus on continual professional development. Core training includes trauma-informed practice, key parent-child attachment principles and how to support parents in implementing these, as well as reflective strategies that support parents in feeling competent and empowered to make positive changes in their lives.

The sad news is that this program that is proven to reduce child abuse and neglect while improving a wide range of health and developmental outcomes for children is **reaching less than 20 percent of eligible families** and is experiencing high levels of staff turnover. We know that for every \$1 invested in the prevention of child abuse returns at least \$8. Please make this investment today that will save money and keep Oregon children safe for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Pamela Heisler
Executive Director

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Mission

To protect children and strengthen families.

Vision

Every child, regardless of race, class, culture, or geography, lives in a safe home in a supportive community.