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Chair Doherty, Vice-Chairs Alonso Leon and Helt, and members of the committee.

**I am writing today in support of HJR 15.**

My name is Dr. Charlotte Peterson. I have been a Clinical Psychologist in Eugene for nearly forty years specializing in Child Psychology, Prenatal, Postpartum, and Infant Mental Health assisting parents to promote positive emotional development in their infants and toddlers. I was Founder and President of the Oregon Network for Infant Mental Health for ten years, Vice Chair of the Oregon Healthy Start Advisory Board, have been a member of both the Lane County Perinatal Mood Disorder Project, and Infant Mortality Commission. I am also the author of: *The Mindful Parent: Strategies from Peaceful Cultures to Raise Compassionate, Competent Kids* based on my observations of parenting in over sixty countries throughout the world.

My lifelong work has been to support parents in preventing emotional wounding of young children. Children in this country, however, are not faring so well. Currently, twenty percent of all kids in the United States are being diagnosed with psychological disorders. The USA uses ninety percent of all the medications in the world that are given to children for mental health issues. Suicide rates of children in America have doubled in the past twenty years. There is a dramatic increase in the severity of bullying, and we tragically have kids using firearms to kill parents, teachers, and other children. *HJR 15 could be an important step in helping to prevent this current epidemic of childhood psychological distress, aggression, and bullying.*

Western brain researchers are finding that environmental factors during pregnancy, birth, and a baby's first few years have tremendous lifelong effects on such abilities as: self-calming, creative problem-solving, self-esteem, self-control, trust, compassion, and empathy. The rate of brain growth in the first few years of babies' lives makes their brains much more vulnerable to damage than adults' brains. Since babies' brains are underdeveloped, with neurons still rapidly creating connections (synapses), the brains of neglected infants become structurally different than those of nurtured infants. Stress causes increased levels of cortisol, an adrenal hormone that has been found to be neurotoxic, causing harm to brain cells, sometimes even killing them. In past generations, there was a commonly held belief that anything that happened to children before they could talk (at about age three) really didn't matter, because they would have no memory of it. We now know that early experiences, which begin in utero, essentially shape a child's brain, and those that occur before age three have the greatest impact on a child's social and emotional development.

Research has also found that repeated early stress experienced by children can also leads to long-term consequences on their overall physical health. While kids can recover from single extremely stressful events without harm, an increased number of traumas early in life can lead to chronic levels of cortisol accumulation that trigger medical conditions such as inflammatory and immune dysfunctions.

HJR 15 would help provide new parents with education and support to assist young children in receiving care that could ensure more positive physical, mental, and emotional development. This could longitudinally reduce funds spent on treatment, remediation, and incarceration. The government of Bhutan subscribes to the belief: "It is much easier [and cheaper] to build a child, than repair an adult."