

Testimony  
Oregon State Joint Student Success Committee  
*Early Childhood Budget 2019-2021*  
April 11, 2019  
Capitol Building, Salem, OR

Participant for the record:

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Co-Chairs Roblan and Smith Warner, members of the Committee, my name is Martha Brooks. I am the State Director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation, a bi-partisan, non-profit organizations of senior law enforcement officials – Chiefs, Sheriffs, District Attorneys, Attorney Generals 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, 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.

We want to commend you for making historic investments in education as well as some early childhood education programs. It is important to make investments in the areas that will give the most return. With that, we ask that you turn your attention to include Healthy Families Oregon, along with Baby Promise, Reach Out and Read and Parenting Education in those investments.

All are a continuum of services starting at birth and sometimes just before that get kids ready for school and for life. Without one service, other services are incomplete. A continued commitment to early intervention and childhood services will continue to build a strong and supportive Early Learning network.

I would like to focus my testimony today on Healthy Families Oregon (HFO). It is a statewide program that the legislature made a commitment to over 25 years ago. It is an intensive service for families with several risk factors. It should not be confused with the new Family Connects Home Visiting program proposed in SB 526. HFO is housed in the Early Learning Division and works with high need parents from prenatal to age 3. The home visitor/parent coaches usually visit once a week and work closely with the parents developing parenting skills as well as baby's skills. Assessments are always happening to make sure everyone is on track for success. Cognitive skills, emotional well-being and health are all important components to this program, which helps reduce child abuse and neglect and increases school readiness. Referrals are made to other appropriate when needed. This is a long-term support for baby and family.

Education does not begin at 3, 4 or 5 years old, but at birth. And as such, we should keep in mind that a child's first teachers are his or her parents and their first classroom is the home. We need to support those teachers in their classroom just as we would any other educator. If they do not have the skills, then that first teacher – the parents – will not do a very good job. HFO home visitors/parent coaches help establish a great



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learning environment. All of this goes a long way to improving a child's early start that gets them ready for Pre-k, kindergarten and school in general.

While HFO and home visiting may seem a little out of your charge, it is not. HFO resides in the Early Learning Division and therefore it is yours and the ELD's responsibility. This is why the members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation ask that you at least provide a minimum of \$2M for HFO. This program was kept at CSL last biennium and at the moment, it appears to be on the same track. We are losing home visitors due to the inability of the program to keep up with expanding and improved pay scales in other programs and I personally fear for the ability of the program to augment the services of Family Connects as there will be more referrals for an intensive service program like HFO.

We all have a commitment to do the very best we can for our kids and make those investments go as far as possible.

And why should we have that commitment? Consider these facts.

- 80-90% of brain development happens between zero and age 5.
- Nearly 50% of all child abuse and neglect cases happen between zero and 5 (48.7%).
- 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 intensive home visiting services.
- During the last biennium, the Healthy Families Oregon received no increase in budget.
- New parents struggle the most and yet we wait until later.

And yes, quality counts and is critical to success.

Why wait? We shouldn't.

- Returns on investments are the greatest in the early years. For every dollar invested in programs like HFO, approximately \$3-4 is returned in the form of reduced crime, increased graduation rates, reduced special educational and social services programs and more.
- This is where we get the biggest bang for the buck.
- Without a foundation kids stumble again and again on their path to graduation.
- They start kindergarten already behind other kids and never catch up.
- If we don't get it right at the start, it costs more; takes longer and sometimes, the damage cannot be undone.

What I can tell you is that investments early can solve a lot of social and emotional problems, get kids ready for school and the investments early can pay back dividends at all ages – not just age 3 or 6 or 18 or 21, but well into adult life. Early childhood programs such as home visiting and other early childhood interventions need your support. Again, the members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and ReadyNation ask you to increase funding to Healthy Families Oregon as well as other early childhood programs.