

I am writing to you in support of a very needed program to assist families with young children experiencing life's severe difficulties.

I am the grandmother of a family in Eugene. They has been experiencing are dramatically difficult time. I live in Omaha, Nebraska and the other grandmother lives in Saint Joe, Missouri. They have no family in Eugene just friends. It's very difficult for us to afford to fly back-and-forth to provide the support they need.

Here is their story:

They had a three year-old child, a little girl. She had a little sister to be born in January 2018. in December 2017 they admitted the mother to the hospital in Portland. There was trouble with the new baby. This baby was born with a very serious heart condition in Portland. It became imperative that she have a heart transplant but needed to wait until she was six months old. They spent their time from December 2017 until late October 2018 in the hospitals of Portland and later Stanford, California, living at Ronald McDonald Houses. The family could not return to their home to live during that time.

The father works for Trader Joe's and the mother is a real estate agent. From mid December 2017 she has not been able to work. Trader Joe's has been unbelievably helpful and supportive. When the baby had to be born in Portland, Trader Joe's allowed him to transfer to Portland to work, and then to Stanford, California when the baby was in the hospital there. Their insurance has been really helpful.

Meanwhile all of the expenses continued as they had purchased a new home and had the typical commitments of a two family income. The savings they had accumulated to compensate for the birth of a normal baby were soon depleted. It would seem that living at Ronald McDonald house would be a great assistance, and it is. But living in a one bedroom hotel room with a three-year-old turning four can be a very difficult experience. Dad working and mom continuously spending time at the hospital with new infant takes its toll. Usually people are in the Ronald McDonald room for a month, not months!

Where are we today? Mom and dad have become master nurses taking care of this wonderful baby. We are starting to see her recognize and respond to people, wave at us and smile. At 14 months she's learning to turn over. She is fed through a feeding tube and is slowly being removed from her medications that kept her alive and comfortable before her heart transplant at six months. There are visits to the hospital and pediatrician constantly. Even a UTI is cause for concern as it raises her temperature and requires fast action. I see the family is constantly on high alert and gets very little rest. Trying to provide a calm family atmosphere takes a lot of work.

Because of the finances they cannot afford the qualified day nurse a child with a heart transplant would require. Finances are stretched. We have raised a little money from friends on Facebook. But that money is only a few pennies toward the expenses the family has incurred. Trader Joe's insurance has been there for them and we are grateful.

But the question is how soon will mom be able to be able to contribute to the family income or even enjoy a few moments to her self. Dad after work comes home to help shoulder the responsibilities. There are car payments, house payments and day care for the four-year-old. When the baby is sick and the four-year-old has a cold she can't go to daycare and can't attend the doctor with the mother. Such a dilemma! And, then there's just maintenance of their home.

As a grandma looking at this from a distance, my heart goes out to them. I'm self-employed in Omaha, NE. The other grandmother is a nurse in Saint Joe, MO. If we leave our jobs to come here there will be no income to help them from our finances.

Many families such as this do exist in our world today. Families have grown smaller there are fewer family members to rely upon as we did in the 60s. We need a better solution.

Financial support, mental and physical solutions are totally in the hands of these overwhelmed parents. Surely there are solutions, if only your awareness of the problem exists and can be acted upon. Yes, there are some financial or psychological programs in place, but they do not meet the overwhelming struggles these families are experiencing.

I do not have the statistics for how many families in Oregon have similar situations. I only know that 417 heart transplants have been accomplished at Stanford University for babies since 1974. These children live all over the United States. The stress on the parents it's too much to bear.

Please consider this FAMILI Equity Act as a solution for those in need. Otherwise, they have only friends, family and work to rely upon. We are most grateful for every touch of generosity that has come our way.

Where will these families be as their children grow and expenses increase?
I ask you to thoughtfully to consider a solution to the overwhelming challenges these families face.

I remain respectfully yours,
Marilyn S. Hansen,
Omaha, Nebraska