

Healthy Families Oregon Coalition

Testimony Oregon State Joint Ways & Means Committee *Department of Education, Early Learning Division, Healthy Families Budget.*

April 17, 2021

SB 5513

Good afternoon Chairs Steiner, Hayward, Johnson and Rayfield, members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you on this beautiful Saturday afternoon.

My name is Lori Colvin, Regional Program Manager for Healthy Families Oregon- High Desert. I have been with Healthy Families Oregon for 20 years and with Head start for 9 years prior to that. I am speaking to you today on behalf of the Healthy Families Oregon Coalition, representing Healthy Families programs in all of District 2. As you know, District 2 is the largest District in Oregon covering 2/3 of our beautiful State. As you may also know, District 2 is to a great extent rural.

Healthy Families Oregon is Oregon's largest child abuse prevention organization. Healthy Families is a voluntary, evidenced-based program. As an infant mental health model, our focus is on relationships. A Family Support Specialist partners with a family for a full 3 years, delivering essential child development, health and parenting information, in their home. Strengthening the bond between parent and child and the relationship between the parent and the Family Support Specialist. This relationship may be the first reliable one that this parent has had, as our families are often from marginalized, high risk communities.

What I am asking for, in collaboration with the Healthy Families Oregon Coalition, is the equitable distribution of funding throughout the Early Learning system in Oregon. Across the State and in rural regions in particular it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified Early Childhood professionals within Healthy Families as these professionals move on to other programs with funding to support higher wages. Estimates of the cost to train new staff have been in the range of \$18K- \$24K. Increasing Healthy Families budget by a minimum of \$10 million will allow us to increase wages and remain competitive employers. We ask that you support the Early Childhood Coalition's agenda to increase early learning investments by \$127 million equitably across the system, so that we are able to continue to serve our vulnerable population and retain our professional early childhood staff.

As quoted from Kofi Annan- Building a culture of prevention is not easy. While the cost of prevention must be paid in the present, the benefits lie in the distant future. Moreover, the benefits are not tangible, they are the disasters that did not happen.

Thank you for your service to our State and your commitment to our future.