

Testimony Oregon State Joint Ways & Means
*Department of Education, Early Learning Division,
Healthy Families Budget, April 21, 2021*



Dear Senator Johnson, Senator Steiner Hayward, Representative Rayfield, and other members of the committee,

I am Chelsea Campbell-Martin, Family Support Specialist (FSS) with Healthy Families Oregon (HFO) program out of Impact NW. I urge you to support the Early Childhood Coalition's agenda of a budgetary increase of \$127 million to be allotted to Oregon's Early Learning programs. Each and every one of these programs provides tremendous support and life changing opportunities to Oregon's most vulnerable, most ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse population: children between the ages of 0 to 5.

Healthy Families Oregon serves families prenatally through age three. As I'm sure you are aware, these are crucial developmental years where the scaffolding of the human experience is formed, setting in motion the trajectory for the rest of one's life. It is during this time that trauma can have devastating impacts on the childhood brain. HFO works to prevent trauma and thus improve the lives of participants and the community at large. **As part of the budgetary increase requested above, I encourage you to increase Healthy Families Oregon's biennial budget by \$10 million, as an investment in HFO is a vital investment in the health and success of our community and the future.**

As an HFO Family Support Specialist, I have had the honor of working with families in the Multnomah county program for the last five and a half years. During this pandemic, my team has continued our services virtually, connecting with families every single week. We have helped families find ways to pay their rent, keep their lights on, find food, repair their cars, start college, connect to childcare (which is NOT EASY in Oregon), get vaccinated, establish medical care, start counseling, find mediation and legal support for divorce, connect with other families in our online groups, learn CPR, address toxic mold, and strengthen their familial connections and communities of support. We have delivered joy to their doorsteps in the form of supplies for activities and games, as well as gifts, diapers and clothing. We've helped carve out moments of play, laughter, growth, and connection for these parents and their children who might otherwise have been unable to find the time or resources to make them possible.

When families receive HFO's services, we support them with the tools to break cycles of child abuse, we increase their capacity to remain sober, we help them to establish and maintain stable housing, and improve childhood school readiness. Families voluntarily choose to stick with our program because they see and experience the benefits and appreciate the individualized supports we offer. Investing in HFO and the families we serve is an investment wisely made. We are successful because of the continuity of care we provide and the long-term trust we establish.

This continuity however is threatened by our low and insufficient wages. I have watched co-workers be forced to leave this work because of an inability to financially support their own

families, despite a strong love of it and an aptitude for this career. When a FSS has to leave for a better paying job, families are impacted, services are disrupted, and grief is experienced by the families we serve and by our own team. The constant cycle of hiring and training is expensive and exhausting. **Higher salaries for Family Support Specialists will create greater retention resulting in improved services and better outcomes for the communities we serve.** Increased compensation for HFO employees is vital to the health and success of all Oregonians.

Support this budget increase. Help vulnerable Oregon families get the resources they need to thrive and contribute to their communities by breaking cycles of abuse and generational poverty. Use your authority to improve the lives of our children, our families, and the entire state. Invest in Oregon's future by investing in our children now.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Chelsea Campbell-Martin (she/her)
Family Support Specialist
Healthy Families - Impact NW
CCampbell-Martin@impactnw.org
503-415-9250

PO BOX 33530, PORTLAND, OR 97292 | 503.294.7400 | www.ImpactNW.org

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