

Good afternoon members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Nancy Berge, and I am the director of the Lane County Family Network, called Families Connected.

This program is one of 10 family networks throughout the state of Oregon that serves more than 12,000 families across 20 counties.

My credentials are college degrees in education and psychology, 20 years foster parent, and I have 22-year-old son who has autism and high support needs.

Family Networks throughout the state provide trainings, resources, community networking and peer-to-peer support. When parents are in crisis, it is the Family Networks who parents reach out to. They look to someone who has the lived experience to guide them through the maze of what navigating education, healthcare, mental health, and disabilities systems.

I have a back log of 15 parents who are in crisis as we speak. They are reaching out in need of support. Today, I have permission from one parent who I am supporting to share what she is going through right now.

Lanita has a full-time job. In addition to her outside the home job, she is a full-time mother, raising 5 children, three of whom have disabilities. Two of her children who experience disabilities are also medically fragile.

Two of her boys need support 24/7, which means Lanita gets up in the middle of the night most nights to tend to them. She is operating on 3 to 6 hours of sleep at night. Lanita, like so many other parents, does not have the capacity to research, vet and determine which resources would be of benefit to her family. Thankfully, Families Connected, the local family network serving all of Lane County, was able to step in and help Lanita and her children get the supports and services they need.

Last summer, the funding for Family Networks was cut in the special legislative session. I am here asking this funding be reinstated for Lanita and countless other parents who are raising children with disabilities and who feel isolated and overwhelmed. Please reinstate the \$1.3 million dollars in funding for the 10 family networks so we can continue to be a lifeline to families. The \$1.3 million is a small investment that will ultimately save the state millions in crisis intervention while supporting families.

Thank you,
Nancy