

April 22, 2021

Chair Frederick, Chair McLain, and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

My name is Kelli Hedlund, a Family Support Specialist, with Healthy Families in Oregon. I am writing you today to ask that the Oregon Legislature increase funding for Healthy Families Oregon (HFO) for the 2021-2023 biennium. Our home visiting program works with families to support them in building strong attachments with their baby(s) using a variety of methods including evidence-based curriculum's. Working with families prenatally, through their birth until their baby turns 3 years old, allows us to assist parents in the newness that parenting brings to a family. Even when the baby is the 5th child in the family there are new challenges and stress that family's often face. By providing these support services, along with providing evidence-base information regarding the importance of parent-child interactions and child development, health and safety, social/emotional development and much more; we are able build on individual parent strengths which lessens much of the stress family's experience and allow parent to focus more on the needs of and interactions with their baby. What we know about brain development is that the most crucial time of brain growth is prenatally through 3 years old. This is when their brains are being wired to regulate emotions, manage stress, gain self-esteem, and build social skills.

"According to the AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics)," "... advances in our understanding of the biology of early childhood adversity should have positive effects on health across the lifespan:

- It should allow for more effective interventions to prevent the lifelong repercussions of early life adversity;
  - It underscores the need for early and sustained investments in children and families to prevent or minimize the impact of early life adversity;
  - It should improve adult learning, productivity and health significantly in the future if wise investments are made now"
- (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/Building-Lifelong-Health-by-Protecting-Young-Brains.aspx>)

Last year, HFO served over 2,000 families but almost 600 families who qualified and requested services didn't receive services due to a lack of resources and funding. These services are even more necessary due to the increased stress that the pandemic has caused families, especially as it continues. Investing in infants and toddlers early on should be one of the top priorities for our communities, states and our country. The risks of not increasing funding to this program include: higher crime and violence, higher child abuse and neglect, higher mental health related illness, higher drug and alcohol use and higher rates of children not graduating with a diploma. Babies hold the key to a better future and if we give parents the knowledge and supports needed to give their babies the best opportunities, their child's success in society will increase and lead to many positive outcomes, not only for the child and family, but for our community and our country.

Thank you for your time and consideration to increase funding for Healthy Families Oregon. Families need this.

Gratefully,

Kelli Hedlund