

Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee
Testimony – HB 5013
March 2, 2023

Good morning, Chairs Fredrick and McLane and members of the Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee. For the record, my name is Shannon Armstrong.

I am the Healthy Families Oregon. (HFO) Program Manager, for the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization serving Baker County and Malheur County.

As a voluntary statewide accredited home visiting program for families pre-natal to age 5, Healthy Families Oregon has been serving families for over 30 years starting in 1992.

As stated above, the Eastern Oregon region of Healthy Families Serves Baker County and Malheur County. We are considered Rural and Frontier. We currently serve 30 families between the two counties, with room to serve 60. We have six full time staff members, four home visitors, one supervisor/eligibility screener and one Program Manager. Our staff travels all around the counties hundreds of miles a day a to serve weekly home visits with families. We currently offer our home visits in multiple language, Spanish, Arabic and Somali.

Although we are currently fully staffed it has not been the case in the past year. We have had a turnover of two home visitors and one supervisor position. Staff have left for a few reasons, one, pay, staff have left to find jobs with higher pay making substantially more than they are currently making. The cost of living in our Rural communities has increased along with the rest of the State, but our wages have not raised to meet the needs of staff. The requirements of staff having to use their own vehicles and putting wear and tear on their cars for a job that requires so much travel has put a strain on staff income. Paying for gas, wear and tear, and a better car to accommodate the travel is added strain.

Yet, our program serves less than 20 percent of those families qualifying for and requesting services. With staff wages increase we will be able to serve more families. It will allow our site to pay staff a living wage and in return lessen the stress of the burden of financial struggles so that they can help families and reach more. With only 20 percent of families being served we could possibly hire on other staff to fill the needs of home visiting throughout our counties and build a strong foundation for our future. I am a firm believer that Early Childhood Education, from prenatal to age 3 is a foundational support for our future. Childhood lasts a lifetime, and we are a part of that.

Currently the return on the investment for Healthy Families is for every dollar invested there is a return of \$1.46 and for families involved in child welfare the return rises to \$3.16. In Baker and Malheur Counties our current data of enrolled families are,

Children with Primary Care Provider– 100%

Children with Up-to-date Immunizations– 100%

Parents Reading to their child three times or more per week – 83%

Parents Reporting Positive Parent-Child Interactions – 93%

Parents Reporting Reduced Parenting Stress – 78%

Parents Reporting HFO Helped with Social Support – 95%

It is an exciting time for Oregon. It is not often that a new agency is created in a state. Now, at the start-up of the agency is when the right size investments should be made for its success and for the success of Oregon's families. While we support the investments the Governor has made in her budget for the new Department of Early Learning and Care, there are still investments that need to be made over and above the GRB.

1. We respectfully ask for a \$15M increase in the DELC budget for Healthy Families Oregon to:
 - a. Increase salaries to a level that is in line with other early learning programs and provides stability in retention of staff, (\$2.3M pay parity left out of the GRB from 2023 increase, \$10M for additional pay increases)
 - b. Purchase a database system (\$800,000) as required for program integrity and accreditation. We currently have to purchase our own database. This database has been instrumental in our service with HFO/HFA. Without a database, we cannot do our job.
 - c. Increase present HFO state staffing by at least 4 new positions (\$1M) to come closer to the levels needed for a program of this size and.
 - d. Provide funding for HFO to open in Lincoln County (\$1.2M).

Now is the time for the leaders of this state to rise to this moment and fund the agency, supply the tools and staff, and to fund the DELC programs at the levels necessary to serve those most at need in our state. By funding early childhood programs, families will thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Armstrong', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Shannon Armstrong, Program Manager, Healthy Families Eastern Oregon