

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

Good morning Chairs Fredrick and McLain and members of the Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee. For the record, my name is Shira Skybinskyy.

I am the Director for Four Rivers Family Early Learning and Parenting based in The Dalles, OR. Our Hub partners with many local organizations across our 5-county region to ensure better outcomes for our region's families with young children. One of our partner organizations is The Next Door, Inc. Along with their involvement with Healthy Families Oregon (HFO), The Next Door currently provides over 24 unique programs to support families and individuals across seven counties in Oregon and Washington.

Healthy Families Oregon is a voluntary statewide accredited home visiting program for families pre-natal to age 3 which has been serving families for over 30 years starting in 1992. The benefits for families involved in these programs are immense. According to the 2019 NPC HFO Status Report, 88% of parents in the programs reported reading to their child 3 or more times per week, 93% reported positive parent-child interactions, 65% reported reduced parenting stress and 90% of parents shared that HFO enhanced their social support. Children involved in HFO programs are also shown to have more secure attachments and a more robust ability to learn and grow once in kindergarten; these outcomes are also directly tied to our Hub's mission of enhancing Kindergarten readiness and learning outcomes for our children.

Yet, HFO programs serve less than 20 percent of those families qualifying for and requesting services, even though a positive ROI of between \$1.46-\$3.16 for every dollar invested in HFA has been shown, according to the Return on Investment Healthy Families America Brief. In 2019, community HFO programs provided screening and referral services to 4,666 families of newborns (11% of all Oregon births) and evidence-based, intensive home visiting services to 1,961 of Oregon's most vulnerable families, however, there are still so many families to reach.

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.
 - 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 reach.

d. Provide funding for HFO to open in Lincoln County (\$1.2M).

Now is the time for Oregon leaders 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.

Sincerely,
Shira Skybinskyy
Director
Four Rivers Family Early Learning and Parenting