



April 11, 2023

Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee  
Testimony – HB 5506

Good morning Co-Chairs Senator Steiner and Representative Sanchez and members of the Joint Ways & Means Education Sub Committee. For the record, my name is Lisa Austin and I am the Supervisor for Healthy Families for Douglas County.

Healthy Families Oregon is a multi-site state program accredited by Healthy Families America (HFA), an affiliate of Prevent Child Abuse America – the nation's oldest and largest organization committed to preventing child maltreatment. Healthy Families is the only child abuse prevention program in Oregon. HFO is a free, voluntary home visiting program offering support and education to families who are expecting or parenting newborns up to age 3. I served as a Healthy Families Family Support Specialist for over 16 years. I have seen firsthand the value of the program in the lives of the families I have served. By providing parents resources, referrals, child development activities and curriculum, and information on bonding and attachment, I have seen parent achieve their dream of being the best parent they can be to their abilities. I have been able to see generational changes within the families I served over the past 17 years.

I have also seen high staff turnover due to the strenuous work and inadequate base pay. The families that we serve, being the highest risk for child abuse and neglect, are becoming more complex. The residual effects of Covid and isolation has created increased mental health concerns and substance abuse issues.

You may ask why I have stayed for so long. Because I see myself as a champion for Healthy Families. I believe in this program. Providing a constant and stable relationship with families for three years increase their success. When staff leave, families leave. This decrease our retentions rates and the impact in the communities. In June of 2022, I became the supervisor for Douglas County. I am now able to train new and current staff and support with more families. Unfortunately, due to the lack of competitive wages we are unable to fill open position and retain staff that we have spent valuable funding and time training.

Present salaries with in the GRB still puts Healthy Families below what other early childhood programs are at and even below the level of other similar jobs. At a minimum, HFO staff still need an additional \$10M to obtain pay parity.

I respectfully ask for you to support the \$15 million increase in the DELC budget for Healthy Families Oregon to:



- 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)
- Purchase a database system (\$800,000) as required for program integrity and accreditation.
- 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.
- 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 DELC agency and Healthy Families at the levels necessary to serve those most at need in our state. By funding early childhood programs, families will thrive. By investing in Healthy Families you are investing in families and young children. By investing in families and young children you are investing in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Lisa Austin*

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