



Cuyahoga County  
Together We Thrive

Office of Early Childhood

April 10, 2019

**Testimony: HB 166**

RE: Line Item Appropriations: Department of Health -- Help Me Grow Program  
Department of Developmental Disabilities: Early Intervention

Chair Romanchuk, ranking member Representative West, and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee. I am Dr. Rebekah Dorman, Director of Invest in Children, our very successful twenty-year old public/private partnership in Cuyahoga County working on behalf of young families and children, as well as the Director of the County Office of Early Childhood.

We strongly support the \$49.3 million increase in the appropriation for Ohio's Help Me Grow program in the Governor's biennial budget proposal. This is a wise investment in Ohio's children and families and in the future of Ohio. First of all, home visiting addresses the need to improve Ohio's dismal infant mortality statistics and close the racial disparity in these rates. Support for pregnant women through the first year of life is crucial to changing those numbers.

In addition, the first few years of life are a period of incredible brain development, during which a child's experiences helps them thrive and keeps them "on track" or, if the child is not in a supportive environment, begins to put them behind. It is when the "achievement gap" begins to form—a gap all too visible in Ohio's statistics on educational outcomes. Laying the firm foundation for a child's life trajectory begins in the family home. Evidence-based home visiting programs which this funding will expand, helps families provide a home environment in which a young child can thrive. Home visiting programs assist families when it is convenient for them, and in a setting where the service provider can best understand the child's needs and the environment in which the family carries out their daily routine.

Situations that may never be seen or discussed in a clinical setting can be noted and acted upon during a home visit. In one recent example in Cuyahoga County, a home visiting nurse took a new mother's blood pressure and realized she needed emergency hospitalization. In another instance, a home visitor described to the parents the "bare naked crib" as the only safe sleep environment for an

infant and the dad immediately got up, grabbed scissors and ran to cut the bumpers off their baby's crib.

The evidence of the impact of effective home visiting models can be seen in numerous studies – some of which have demonstrated a return on investment of up to \$5.70 for every dollar spent. Even the most conservative study results highlighted in an August 2018, briefing report<sup>1</sup> by the National Conference of State Legislatures showed an 80 percent return on each dollar invested. This level of return is not often seen in publicly funded programs and is one of the primary reasons that home visiting services have broad bi-partisan support at both the state and federal levels. In allocating scarce dollars, legislators need to be confident that funded programs will provide clearly demonstrable near and long-term returns. Evidence-based home visiting programs have been proven to also impact on indicators related to brain development, higher IQ and language scores, and even higher graduation rates from high-school.<sup>2</sup>

Among the most powerful slate of outcomes cited by the National Conference of State Legislators in their legislative brief on home visiting is the following:

*“Multiple studies have found that children involved in home visiting are better prepared for school and experience fewer emergency room visits and less abuse and neglect. Research also indicates that parents who participate in home visiting are more self-sufficient. For example, parents complete more education, have higher employment rates, pay more in taxes, engage in less criminal activity and are less reliant on government programs.”*

Ohio's Help Me Grow program is evidence-based, and the proposed additional \$49.3 million in funding is the logical next step to follow the commitment the legislature made to Help Me Grow in 2017, when SB. 322 established the program as the state's parent support program and confirmed only the use of promising and evidence-based models. Additionally, Ohio has now implemented and refined a statewide centralized intake system for Help Me Grow, which is well-positioned to handle such a meaningful expansion and ensure that residents in our most rural areas get the same level of access and support as those from areas with more resources.

We also urge you to support the wise \$46.5 million investment in Early Intervention which will allow expansion of services to meet the needs of Ohio's infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities and their families. A recent change in eligibility rules, cheered by many around the state, will make these crucial services automatically available to infants and toddlers with elevated lead levels and to infants born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome. These babies, through no fault of

their own, begin life with significant threats to their healthy on track development. With effective services, the impact of these experiences can be mitigated or eliminated, so that the child's development may proceed on course. With leadership from the Department of Developmental Disabilities, Early Intervention in Ohio is delivered in an evidence-based format with services delivered in the home or in another natural environment of the child. It is imperative that we support these children in those first crucial years to avoid later deficits that affect the child and the family and are much costlier to address effectively, if possible at all.

As you work to help support and provide an opportunity for young children and families in Ohio to thrive -- and to maximize the valuable social and financial return received on tax-payer funded programs -- the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly has an opportunity to invest in Ohio's most precious resource: its children. The funding increase provided for Help Me Grow and Early Intervention in the proposed Ohio 2020-2021 biennial budget, should be maintained through strong bi-partisan support as a prudent investment in the near and long-term future of our state.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Rebekah Dorman, PhD  
Director  
Invest in Children/Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood

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<sup>1</sup> Courtney L. Harrison; Alison May -- "*Home Visiting: Improving Children's and Families' Well-Being*"; National Conference of State Legislatures, Legislative Brief, Vol. 26, No. 31; August, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Cole -- "*The Research Case for Home Visiting*"; Zero to Three, Washington, D.C,