

Amended Substitute House Bill 96-State Operating Budget for FY 2026-2027

Senate Finance Committee

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Prevention & Wellness, Franklin County Public Health

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Subject: Support the Amendment to Fully Fund the Family Connects Program Expansion

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Finance Committee, my name is Alex Jones, and I am the Assistant Health Commissioner and Director of Prevention & Wellness at Franklin County Public Health. Thank you for the opportunity to briefly speak about home visiting as part of the Help Me Grow line item in the Department of Children and Youth's budget.

As a public health nurse administrator overseeing maternal and child health programming, I'm here to speak in strong support of **Amendment SC0458**, which fully restores funding for Governor DeWine's maternal and infant health initiatives — including the **Family Connects** program.

Through the **evidence-based** Family Connects model, registered nurses provide home visits to all birth mothers regardless of income or other criteria. This model has shown to reduce ER visits and improve long-term physical and mental health outcomes. **Public Health Nurses (PHNs)** are skilled at navigating postpartum needs, bridging gaps in care, and connecting families to these crucial community supports.

To date, **18 Ohio counties** have received funding for Family Connects. Eleven of those 18 counties are led by local health departments where **PHNs** are already making a measurable difference. While my department is not currently a Family Connects grant recipient, we still provide nurse led home visits to subsets of our population and see firsthand how these visits make a difference. I'd like to share the impact our team has had—and how this program could benefit your constituents.

Home visiting is a **powerful tool** for **supporting families and improving health outcomes**. By meeting clients in their homes, we build trust, assess environments, and provide timely education. For example, one of our PHNs who serves children with complex medical conditions and their families, recently identified critical safety issues, including oxygen usage near flammable items and lack of a carbon monoxide (CO2) monitor in their home. As a result, the nurse provided both education on safe utilization of oxygen therapy and having a working CO2 monitor in the home. Additionally, she was able to provide them with a CO2 monitor as part of our safety kit distribution offerings available to our home visiting clients.

Our team works to reduce infant mortality through consistent postpartum support, health education, and early intervention. Initiatives like **safe sleep education and Pack 'n Play distribution are simple interventions that are lifesaving**. Another of our PHNs who provides prenatal and postpartum home visits recently helped a young, 19-year-old mother secure childcare, Title XX, and Medicaid so she could **pursue her education and employment goals while ensuring a safe environment for her child**.

Ohio ranks 43rd in infant mortality. Nearly 40% of new moms miss postpartum checkups due to lack of transportation, childcare, or paid leave. That means serious risks — like postpartum depression and hypertension — go unaddressed. Home visits by PHNs **bridge that gap**. PHNs can reach families early, offer screenings, and connect them with supports that change lives.

PHNs are trained professionals who build trust, identify issues, and create individualized care plans. By leveraging relationships with hospitals and providers, PHNs deliver comprehensive support—often preventing costly interventions. **These preventive services improve outcomes, reduce Medicaid costs, lower absenteeism, and ease pressure on the healthcare system**. PHN-led home visiting promotes community health and long-term wellbeing.

Thank you in advance for supporting the **Amendment SC0458** as introduced to fully fund the Family Connects home visiting program. With your leadership, we can expand this proven model statewide and ensure more Ohio families get the care and connection they deserve.

Sincerely,



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