

**HB 96- Interested Party Testimony**  
**Senate Health Committee**  
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**May 13, 2025**

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson and Ranking Member Liston, thank you for the opportunity to present interested party testimony on House Bill 96. in support of funding for statewide home visitation services. My name is Robert Ammerman, and I am Scientific Director of Every Child Succeeds, an independent 501c3 in Cincinnati and a Help Me Grow Home Visiting Provider in Hamilton, Butler, and Clermont Counties. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to talk to you today about a critical and essential service provided to thousands of children and families who are living on the edge across Ohio – Help Me Grow. I am here today to ask for your support of Amendment SC0458 to restore the Governor's as-introduced appropriation for statewide expansion of evidence-based home visitation services.

Through the Help Me Grow program with the Department of Children and Youth, we at Every Child Succeeds have demonstrated that early intervention to provide support to at risk, first-time mothers can deliver positive, quantifiable short and long-term outcomes for the mother, baby, families and their communities to help their children's development prenatally through the first 3 years of life. Two-thirds of these mothers are either victims of violence themselves or have been witnesses to violence. They are fragilely connected to the workforce. They are low-income. One-half are clinically depressed. In short, they are some of our highest risk Ohioans.

For the child, the impact of Help Me Grow services is significant. I ask you to consider the following. By age 3, 80% of your brain development is done. Neurons form at the most rapid rate than at any other time in development and learning begins immediately. During this time, in a positive environment, the foundation of future social and emotional development is established, and children are likely to go on to develop healthy relationships with parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. Early and frequent reading to children sets the stage for normal language development, which in turn launches the child on a trajectory for success in pre-school, kindergarten, elementary school, and beyond. The first three years of life are a window of opportunity for achievement in school, employment, and life. Indeed, enrolling families early, particularly during pregnancy provides the best opportunity to build the foundations for future success in development. Working with new parents at this time creates a unique opportunity to build nurturing and stimulating parenting practices before unhealthy habits are formed. The research literature indicates that families who join home visiting programs during pregnancy or in the first few months of the child's life experience the largest benefits from home visiting.

Yet, this is also a time of vulnerability. Failure to provide a stimulating and nurturing environment leads to numerous negative outcomes for children. Abuse and neglect can limit brain development, sometimes profoundly and irreversibly. Poor attachment to other people in the first years of life affects social and emotional health throughout childhood and into the adult years. By age 2, children raised in an un-stimulating environment are 6 months behind their peers in terms of language development. This gap in language development between children raised in

stimulating and un-stimulating homes widens over time. For these children, the window of opportunity closes quickly, and the trajectory is one of poor school performance, unhealthy relationships, social and emotional difficulties, and limited employment opportunities. There are profound costs across the lifespan for these outcomes, and considerable opportunity costs as well.

Help Me Grow home visitation services prevent and reverse these negative trajectories. Indeed, in 2017 the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended “unwavering” support of home visiting programs such as Help Me Grow noting that “High-quality home-visiting services for infants and young children can improve family relationships, advance school readiness, reduce child maltreatment, improve maternal-infant health outcomes, and increase family economic self-sufficiency.” Through frequent home visits over the critical first years of life, home visitors provide information, support, build parenting skills, and link families to community resources that lead to self-sufficiency. The result is a home environment for young children that is stimulating, nurturing, and stable. Rigorous evaluations of home visiting programs have shown that they decrease child abuse and neglect, lower rates of prematurity and low birthweight, increase attendance at pediatric well-child visits, facilitate achievement of developmental milestones, decrease child emotional and behavioral problems that are precursors to later mental health disorders, prepare children for success in kindergarten, and improve maternal health and well-being.

Moreover, the return on investment is impressive. Research demonstrates that early childhood home visiting programs provide a return on investment of \$5.70 for every dollar spent. In addition to this compelling economic benefit, home visiting prepares children to be happy, successful, and productive citizens. Ohio has a national reputation for supporting vulnerable children and families, and I again ask for your support of Amendment SC0458 to restore the Governor’s as-introduced appropriation for statewide expansion of evidence-based home visitation services.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome the opportunity to address any questions you may have.