



Darke County General Health District

Jordan Francis, MPH, Health Commissioner

Contributing to a Stronger, Healthier Community

House Bill 96 – State Operating Budget for FY 2026-27

Senate Health Committee

Emily Hoisington, MBA, BSN, RN, Director of Nursing, Darke County General Health District

May 14, 2025

Subject: Reinstate the Governor's Request for Full Funding of the Family Connects Program

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Health Committee, I am Emily Hoisington, the Director of Nursing at the Darke County General Health District. Thank you for the opportunity to 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, I urge you to reinstate the Governor's request for full funding of \$53 million to fully implement the Family Connects program across Ohio. This investment is not only lifesaving, but also fiscally responsible. For every \$1 invested in a home visiting program, there is a return of up to \$5.70.¹

Family Connects Ohio can provide all families, regardless of income, with an in-home visit from a registered nurse approximately three weeks postpartum. Public health nurses bring a unique and invaluable skill set to these visits, offering medical care, emotional support, and vital connections to local services. The evidence-based Family Connects model has been shown to reduce emergency room visits by 50% and lower postpartum anxiety by 28%. This proactive, early intervention offers families much needed support during a critical time, improving both maternal and infant health outcomes.

To date, 11 local health departments have been awarded Family Connects funding and public health nurses are already delivering services. Our health department was fortunate enough to be selected as one of the pilot programs and we have been delivering the Family Connects model since February.

Our stories reflect not only the compassion of our healthcare workers but also the lived experiences and barriers faced by your constituents – in both urban AND rural counties. I would like to share a couple of experiences from living and working in rural Darke County.

Eight years ago, I was a first-time parent looking for a job with better hours than hospital floor nursing could offer. When I accepted a position as a Help Me Grow home visitor and public health nurse at the local health department, I imagined I'd be giving vaccines and spending my days playing with babies. What I didn't realize was how deeply the families I served would change me—how their stories, their struggles, and their strength would leave a lasting mark on my heart. Early in my career, I got a phone call I will never forget. A mother I had just started working with told me her baby had died in her sleep. As her nurse, I helped her access mental health services, and I stood beside her as she planned her baby's funeral. At the service, surrounded by grief and unanswered questions, I couldn't help but wonder: What if we'd reached this family sooner? Would they be celebrating a first birthday instead of grieving the loss of their child?

Another challenge I've encountered, one that our public health nurses see all too often, is postpartum depression. It often goes undetected until a mother's six-week postpartum checkup, if it's identified at all. That's why our Family Connects Ohio program, though still in its early stages, holds so much promise. By reaching families within the first few weeks after birth, this program creates an opportunity to screen for and address postpartum depression well before the typical follow-up visit with a healthcare provider.

¹https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG341.pdf

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Early support can make all the difference—not just for the mother’s mental health, but for bonding, infant development, and overall family well-being.

It is commonly known that Ohio ranks 43rd in infant mortality. This is not just a statistic -it’s a moral call to action. For a variety of reasons, including lack of transportation and paid leave, as many as 40% of mothers in Ohio do not attend postpartum checkups, despite rising rates of postpartum depression, hypertension, and other complications.

Public health nurses are trained professionals who know how to engage mothers in care. They identify problems early and design responsive care plans, leveraging trusted relationships with hospitals and providers to support newborns and families. Again, these services reduce Medicaid costs, lower absenteeism, and improve long-term outcomes. The ROI is clear: for every \$1 invested in home visiting, there is a return of up to \$5.70. Family Connects Ohio directly aligns with the Department of Children and Youth’s goal of reducing infant mortality.

As a public health nurse and a mother, I know firsthand the challenges families face and I can confidently say the future of Ohio is in the hands of our youth. I urge you to restore the full \$53 million funding for Family Connects Ohio, ensuring that every family across Ohio has access to these essential services. Every baby, no matter their zip code, deserves the same chance at a healthy first year of life. We cannot afford to turn our backs on a program that saves lives, supports families, and strengthens communities.

Let’s work together to “do what’s right for kids.” Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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