



## Trumbull County Combined Health District

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Frank J. Migliozi, MPH, REHS, Health Commissioner



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

#### Senate Health Committee

Erin Heckman, BS, RN, Director of Nursing, Trumbull County Combined 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 Erin Heckman, the Director of Nursing at the Trumbull County Combined Health District. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss 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 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.

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 January.

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 Trumbull County. I am the mother of 4 grown children, ranging in ages from 29 years old to 19 years old. My oldest daughter, who is now 29 years old, was born severely premature at 25 weeks old. When she was born in 1995, I was 21 years old, with limited knowledge and resources. It was one of the

most stressful events of my life and a program such as Family Connects would have been a tremendous resource for me. My daughter was hospitalized for 3 months, and a Family Connects visit could have potentially provided me with the needed programs that were not well-known to the public. I have witnessed families in similar situations such as mine receive the much-needed resources through our Family Connects home visits.

Another lived experience is battling postpartum depression. Following the births of my three older children, I did not have issues with depression. I experienced the normal “baby blues.” This all changed after the birth of my youngest son, who is now 19 years old. Something didn’t feel right, something was different, after his birth, and I kept brushing it off. I did not feel like I had any reason to feel sad, depressed, or anxious. After all, I had four amazing children and a supportive husband. Eventually, when my youngest son turned 2 years old, I finally sought help and was successfully treated for depression and anxiety. I feel that a program such as Family Connects, if it had been available, would have identified my symptoms and I could have received assistance much sooner, rather than feeling alone and isolated for the two years prior to receiving help. 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. 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 funding for Family Connects Ohio, ensuring that every family across Ohio has access to these

essential services. Every baby, no matter what 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,  
Erin Heckman, BS, RN  
Director of Nursing  
Trumbull County Combined Health District