



## Fayette County Public Health

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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

Senate Health Committee

Ashley Roberts, RN, Director of Nursing, Fayette County Public Health

May 12, 2025

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

Dear Senator Shane Wilkin,

I am Ashley Roberts, the Director of Nursing at Fayette County Public Health Department. Thank you for taking the time to read through my letter concerning home visiting as it pertains to 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 visit program, there is a return of up to \$5.70.<sup>1</sup>**

Public Health Nurses (PHNs) bring a unique skill set to home visiting, especially in the vulnerable postpartum period. Through the evidence-based Family Connects model, RNs conduct home visits for all birth mothers, reducing emergency room visits and improving health outcomes for entire families.

To date, 18 counties have been awarded Family Connects funds, with 11 led by local health departments where PHNs are already delivering results. 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 live and work in rural Fayette County and can share a few experiences.

Postpartum depression and mental health needs are among the most common referrals we make. During the first program year, 41% of the mothers seen were referred for mental health services. Early intervention makes a critical difference, yet many mothers never make it to their postpartum visits due to transportation or financial barriers. Our nurses meet them at home when no one else can.

The infant mortality rate in Fayette County is 6.2, higher than Healthy People 2030 target of 5.0 infant deaths or less per 1,000 live births, and safe sleep continues to be a concern. One family we visited had no safe place for their baby to sleep and were resorting to unsafe co-sleeping. Thanks to a partnership with Cribs for Kids, we were able to provide a crib during our visit and educate the family on safe sleep practices. This kind of immediate, in-home support saves lives.

In rural communities like ours, we lack a birthing center and have very limited OB services. For many families, a nurse visiting their home is their only postpartum contact with the healthcare system. As a local support and resource, we are able to identify key partners to expand our reach and services in a fiscally responsible manner, and make referrals to key services.

It is commonly known that Ohio ranks 43rd in infant mortality. This is not 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. Nurses reach these families early—within three weeks of birth—offering medical care, emotional support, and vital connections to services.

PHNs 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 wrap support around 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.**

If Ohio is truly “a great place to raise a family,” then 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.

Please restore full funding to the Family Connects program. Your leadership today will shape Ohio's health and prosperity for generations.

Sincerely,

Ashley Roberts, RN  
Director of Nursing  
Fayette County Public Health