

Interested Party Testimony, HB 96
Margaret Clark, Program & Operations Director, Every Child Succeeds
Senate Health Committee
May 14, 2025

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, and Ranking Member Liston, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of statewide expansion of evidence-based home visitation services as proposed by Governor DeWine. Specifically, I ask for your support of Amendment SC0458 which would restore the Governor's as-introduced appropriation for FY27 for these critical services for mothers and babies in this state.

My name is Margaret Clark, and I serve as the Program and Operations Director at Every Child Succeeds. I am a lifelong resident of Ohio and have worked in the early childhood field for more than 30 years. Over that time, I have seen firsthand the profound impact early support has on families and children during the critical developmental window from birth to age three -when the foundation for future learning, health, and well-being is established.

Babies don't come with instructions, and many families -especially those facing economic hardship - need support to provide the nurturing care that young children require to thrive. When families lack financial resources, emotional well-being, or social support, it becomes more difficult to meet the developmental and health needs of their infants. This is where the Help Me Grow Home Visiting program makes a transformative difference.

Help Me Grow Family Support Specialists are highly trained professionals who build trusting, long-term relationships with families. They help parents:

- Read and respond to their babies' cues
- Understand developmental milestones
- Use everyday activities to support learning and growth
- Set and achieve personal and parenting goals
- Access vital health and social services

Every Child Succeeds (ECS), a Help Me Grow provider in southwest Ohio, has served the community for 25 years (1999–2024) and has achieved impressive outcomes:

- 31,138 families served
- 804,298 home visits completed
- 94.5% of children had a safe play environment
- 93.9% of children's behavioral health screenings showed no concerns at the end of the program

A research study found that mothers who enrolled in ECS early in pregnancy and received at least eight prenatal home visits experienced a **60% reduction in the risk of preterm birth**—a powerful indicator of both immediate and long-term health benefits.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from the families themselves. One mother, who credits her Family Support Specialist with helping her become a nurse, shared:

“I was navigating motherhood, but I didn’t have to wing it like a lot of mothers do. It was a relief to have someone there—not just for my baby, but for me. My specialist supported my mental health, encouraged goal setting, and held me accountable for the things I set out to do.”

Programs like Help Me Grow are not just investments in children - they are investments in the strength and resilience of families and communities across Ohio.

Thank you for your continued support of this life-changing work.