

HB 96- Interest Party Testimony
Senate Health Committee
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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit interested party testimony on House Bill 96 in support of **funding for Help Me Grow Home Visiting Services**. My name is Jennifer Frey, and I am the president and chief executive officer of Every Child Succeeds, an independent 501c3 in Cincinnati and a Help Me Grow Home Visiting Provider in Hamilton, Butler, and Clermont Counties. I am writing today to ask for your **support of Amendment SC0458 to restore** the Governor's as-introduced **FY27 appropriation** for Ohio's expansion of evidenced-based home visitation services through Help Me Grow in the Department of Children and Youth.

While I recognize that funding is limited, and cuts must be made, I request that our youngest and most vulnerable children not be the consequences of any cuts. The promising impact of Ohio's increased investment in prenatal-to-age three evidence-based programming for families most at risk for economic, health, and educational challenges cannot be overstated. The timing of these services must be prioritized as well. **It is in the first three years of a child's life that we have the greatest chance of improving outcomes.** Eighty percent of a child's brain is developed in the first three years. We know that the number of words a child knows at age three significantly predicts later academic success. If we stop support at age one or wait to offer support until a child enters kindergarten, we have not only lost an important opportunity, but we've increased the cost and decreased the likelihood we will be able to course correct to make up for this lost opportunity. The most cost-effective means to improve outcomes in education, health, and economic productivity and reducing the need to invest in later social services and crime reduction is implementation of evidence-based prevention programming for parents and children prenatal-to-age three.

In Every Child Succeeds' 25 years of operation, we have served 21,438 Ohio Families who participated in more than 800,000 visits completed by trained family support specialists in the fields of early childhood education, child development, nursing, and/or social work. At Every Child Succeeds, home visits in Ohio are completed with fidelity to one of three models: Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, or Family Connects Ohio. Every Child Succeeds values the distinct and common elements of each of the models we implement, but across all models, you will notice key themes: **improved maternal and child health; enhanced parenting confidence and skills; reduced child maltreatment; positive child development; and economic benefits.** Every Child Succeeds' implementation of evidence-based home visiting with families in Southwest Ohio has resulted in healthier parents with plans for continued education or employment, more supportive learning environments in which children can grow, and young children ready to succeed in school and life. For example,

- 90% of children enrolled in Every Child Succeeds have developmental screening scores within typical developmental ranges at the end of program completion,
- 94% of children's behavioral health screenings reveal no concerns at the end of program participation,
- 95% of homes have safe play environments, and

- 98% of mothers report coping effectively with parenting stress.

However, public dollars alone do not account for these outcomes. **We leverage public dollars to secure additional private dollars to support the outcomes we achieve.** In FY24, 63% of our funding came from public sources and 37% from private with 89% of our operating budget spent on direct services.

Current funding levels are insufficient to meet the needs.

- Ohio currently is ranked 40th in the United States for the percentage of children ages 0-5 living in poverty and 30th for infant maltreatment.
- In 2022, more than 3,000 children in Ohio under the age of one were victims of abuse and neglect.
- In 2024, 5,963 children in Ohio's protective services custody were under the age of six.

While home visiting is designed to prevent child maltreatment, **we are not reaching enough families.** Last year, only 8.8% of families in need of home visiting services received them. We must do better, and we can do better.

If these data do not sell the story, then the economic benefits will. Investing in prenatal to three evidence-based prevention programming, like Help Me Grow Home Visiting, yields significant returns in the form of reduced healthcare costs, decreased need for special education services, decreased involvement in the child welfare and criminal justice systems, and increased productivity in the workforce. By supporting and increasing our investment in parents and our youngest citizens, we are generating significant cost savings for taxpayers and making a wise investment in the future of our state.

For FY26, the Governor proposed a budget of \$63.59 million for home visitation for an estimated 19,200 families. (Keep in mind these dollars support parents and children.) These numbers yield an average cost of \$3,312 per year per family. The cost of special education services ranges from \$10,000 - \$30,000 per student per year. A cost-benefit analysis of Nurse-Family Partnership showed a reduction in the number of children needing to be placed in special education settings because prevention and intervention services were provided in the first years of life. Ohio's investment in early childhood programming, including home visitation, can yield a **state savings of up to \$6 in future educational costs for every \$1 spent on early childhood.** Home visiting also decreases the need for child welfare involvement. In a 2015 study evaluating the return on investment for implementation of HFA in Florida, researchers **found a net savings of \$5,532 per family enrolled in home visiting** – mostly attributed to fewer child abuse cases.

States like Florida, Missouri, and Washington have demonstrated that their investments in early childhood are leading to long-term savings. I would love to see Ohio on that list, too. Why would we not only adopt the Governor's proposed budget in FY26 but also support continued expansion and investment in FY27? Decreasing or maintaining funding levels from FY26 to FY27 removes the opportunity to bring the program to scale and provide support for more families. Let's continue our increased investment in Help Me Grow Home Visiting so that every child in Ohio can succeed.