



## SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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### NEWS RELEASE

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### **Voluntary nurse visits lead to healthier children and families**

*SB 526: Requires design and implementation of voluntary statewide program*

SALEM – Parents will have access to important resources to help their infant children’s development in the crucial early years, under a bill passed by the Oregon Senate.

[Senate Bill 526](#) – which passed the Senate on a 22-5 vote today – requires the Oregon Health Authority to design, implement and maintain a voluntary statewide program to provide newborn nurse home visiting services to all participating families with newborns residing in the state, regardless of income level or socioeconomic background.

“We know that increasing access to comprehensive, preventive healthcare leads to healthier individuals, and a healthier state,” Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Beaverton), who carried the bill on the Senate floor, said. “Establishing this program, which is completely voluntary, will help Oregon cut down on costly, unnecessary emergency room visits for children under the age of 1. It’s estimated that for every dollar invested in the program, there will be \$3.17 in savings. We have an opportunity to triple the return on our investment.”

This concept is working in other communities. Duke University’s Family Connects program provides between one and three nurse home visits to every family with newborns beginning at about 3 weeks old, regardless of income or demographic risk. Using a tested screening tool, a nurse measures newborn and maternal health and assesses strengths and needs to link the family to community resources. The cost per family is around \$600, which is expected to come partly from private sources such as foundations and commercial insurers.

“Offering a nurse or trained case worker to visit soon after the arrival of a new child is a service enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of families annually in the United States,” Children First for Oregon Strategic Director James Barta said. “Research on many home visiting programs has shown a financial benefit greater than the cost of the program. Home visiting programs protect children, help parents take responsibility and are an investment with significant short- and long-term benefits.”

In Oregon, Lincoln County Public Health currently runs a pilot program based on Family Connects, called Babies First Home Visits, or Babies First for short. It helps families learn to care for newborns and children up to 3 years old. Babies First operates as a developmental screening program for children at risk of developmental delay due to a variety of risk factors such as premature birth, drug exposure during pregnancy, low birth weight, family income and other factors. Services available through Babies First include home visits to new families and children with special needs, assessments of home safety, child development education, referrals for medical care and social services, as needed, and others.

Oregon Health Authority will be required to consult, coordinate and collaborate with health benefit plan insurers, hospitals, local public health authorities, the Early Learning Division, existing early childhood home visiting programs, community-based organizations and social service providers in designing the program. It also establishes standards for nurse home visiting services.

“Most families report needing support after the birth of a new baby,” Coalition of Local Health Officials Executive Director Morgan Cowling testified. “One in four Oregon women report symptoms of prenatal or postpartum depression which can put babies at risk for developmental, emotional, behavioral and learning problems. One universal home visiting program called Family Connects showed that participating families had increased quality parenting behaviors and home environments and a decrease in maternal clinical anxiety and infant emergency medical care.”

Senate Bill 526 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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