

Help Me Grow

of Cuyahoga County

PRENATAL TO THREE SERVICES

*Children growing...
healthy,
happy and safe.*

Senate Finance and Education Committees

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Help Me Grow of Cuyahoga County
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Chairman Carey and Chairman Cates and members of the Senate Finance and Education Committees: My name is Melissa Manos and I am the Project Director for Help Me Grow of Cuyahoga County in Cleveland, Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Help Me Grow.

Many of us right now are wondering what the future will bring. But, if we look around, the future surrounds us. The future is about our infants and toddlers and their families. We are building the future through the lives of these young children. The infants and toddlers in these pictures [display] are unable to be here today, but as we debate together what services the citizens of Ohio consider **essential**, I hope the faces and the stories of our *youngest* citizens among us will not be forgotten. They are our future and we must offer our fullest efforts to ensure they receive the very best start in life.

I would like to share what Help Me Grow offers the youngest children of Ohio. Since 1986, when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act passed an amendment that would provide services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities, the importance of these *earliest* interventions has been clear. When developmental concerns are identified during the critical first years of life, the prognosis for the child is much better. After years of research, early intervention has been shown to both improve the functioning of the family and to reap long term benefits for society. Help Me Grow is there for children with developmental concerns and their families. As one mother of a newborn with Down Syndrome said, "I didn't know what my next steps were until I had Help Me Grow" and another mother of a child with a hearing disorder said, "My one phone call to Help Me Grow made all the difference for my child and me!" In Cuyahoga County we annually serve around 1900 children with special needs and their families.



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Ohio needs to **continue** to go forward with these *earliest* interventions so our children are ready for the challenges of the future.

We know that negative experiences and toxic stress is detrimental to a young child's development. Help Me Grow also reaches children whose early development may be compromised because of family life issues and risk factors. In Cuyahoga County, we have offered home visiting support to nearly 4,000 families annually whose children may be vulnerable for developmental delays. As you know, the first years of life actually build the brain! Early experiences matter! Help Me Grow home visits help caregivers track their child's development, identify developmental concerns early, and provide nurturing environments for their children. Especially now, families are under enormous stress and it is imperative that Ohio's early care and education leadership and Ohio's legislators continue to develop ways to support these vulnerable children and their families. When we invest early in a child's life with high quality services and supports, we are building a brighter future for us all.

Also under the umbrella of Help Me Grow has been the newborn home visit by a registered nurse, which, in Cuyahoga County, targeted first time and teen parents, universally. This visit by a registered nurse shortly after the baby leaves the hospital has been praised by parents and medical professionals alike. It helps to identify both health and social issues very early in a newborn's life and make those linkages to necessary services. The elimination of the newborn home visits from the menu of Help Me Grow services has been of real concern and consternation in our county. I would encourage Ohio's early childhood care and education leadership and Ohio legislators to explore all avenues and resources to provide support to all parents of newborns.

The eligibility changes to the Help Me Grow program and the significant funding cuts to Help Me Grow in SFY10 is a challenge for Help Me Grow of Cuyahoga County and across the state. In Cuyahoga County alone we are slated to receive a 44% cut in funding and this will mean we will be serving 57% less At Risk families and 30% less Part C eligible families annually. What this also means is that we will not be able to serve thousands of children and their families who are experiencing crisis and desperately need our support. I am confident, however, that Ohioans want to give our young children priority attention and support. Especially in these trying economic times, we can not afford to go backwards on our future. We must continue to make the **essential** investments of **resources and vision** to provide quality services and supports for newborns, infants, and toddlers and their families.

I am pleased to share the photos of some our Cuyahoga County Help Me Grow kids -- here is Brandon, a child with Down Syndrome, and here are Vikki and Nikki, twins who were born prematurely, and here are DeAdra and Kaylenna, a mother and her daughter. These kids and all the young children and families of Ohio are counting on us. A child

can't wait. Now is the time a child is building their lifetime...and now is the time Ohio's future is being formed.

I am grateful for the support that the Senators have provided for Help Me Grow for many years. I urge you to continue to prioritize Ohio's youngest children by generously supporting Help Me Grow and ensuring these essential services to our most vulnerable infants and toddlers.

Thank you for your attention and I would be happy to answer any question you have at this time.