



Working Together for Student and Family Success.

March 6, 2022

RE: HF3886

Dear Minnesota Legislators:

It is with great enthusiasm I submit this letter of support for HF 3886. As Program Director for the Robbinsdale Area Redesign Family Service Collaborative, I oversee the Helping Us Grow (HUG) universal early childhood home visiting program. The HUG program began in 2000, as a pilot program with North Memorial Hospital for the City of Robbinsdale residents who were expecting, adopting, or parenting a child up to 36 months of age. The impetus behind HUG was to respond to:

- The Family Service Collaborative's statewide shared priority goal of early childhood identification and early childhood outreach
- Research in early brain development indicating that experiences in the first few years of a child's life are the most critical due to rapid brain development
- Hospitals no longer offering postpartum home visiting unless there was a high-risk birth concern
- Knowledge about the impact that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and early childhood trauma can have not only on childhood development, neuro epigenetics, and success, but also on adult health and the development of adult chronic diseases.

Since 2000, HUG has grown to include all Hennepin County communities. HUG partners offer free, universal, voluntary home visiting to all families, regardless of income, age, or risk, and utilizes the expertise of licensed ECFE home visitors within the 16 public school districts within Hennepin County. While HUG has many additional partners, who provide referrals to HUG, such as hospitals, clinics, doulas, county public health systems, and other long-term home visiting programs, the majority of our referrals are from families themselves. This speaks to how families perceive the "value added" and the ease of referring "anyone" and "everyone."

HUG has learned over the years these great benefits in offering universal home visiting:

Reduced Stigma for Participation: By offering universal home visiting, the stigma of being "targeted" due to risk or other concern is removed, providing an improved comfort level of participation for families. Just like going to school, universal home visiting is a support available to all.

Increased Ease for Referring Agencies: HUG has often heard from clinics and partners in the community that having a local universal home visiting program makes it easier to make referrals, when all families are supported and accepted, regardless of income or risk factors. They can also trust that families will be screened for more intensive home visiting services and programs.

Increased Connections to Additional Early Childhood Support and Long-term Home Visiting: Almost 99% of all families receiving a home visit from HUG/ECFE sign up for additional community supports, whether it is ECFE programming, county public health services like WIC and Child & Teen Checkup, basic needs support, and screening for appropriate referrals to targeted long-term home visiting “sister” programs such as Family Spirit, Healthy Families, or Family Ties.

Increased Mental Health and Community Supports: ECFE home visitors screen families for perinatal mood disorder and infant mental health, connections to early childhood special education, school readiness and basic needs supports such as housing, food, safe sleep, car seats, diapers, and childcare information. The role of the licensed parent educator goes far beyond parent education.

Shared Parent Education Learning to Extended Family Members: Universal home visiting provides parent education to not only birth mothers, but also co-parents, fathers, extended family members such as grandparents and caregivers--creating shared knowledge, shared family goals, and support.

Increased Outreach and Participation of Diverse Cultural Participation: Today’s ECFE is not yesteryear’s ECFE. Universal home visiting provides additional outreach to and increases participation from diverse cultures in preschool ECFE programming and supports.

Decreased Isolation/Improved Connections to Community: Universal home visiting provides connections for parents with infants to connect with other parents with children of the same age, creating social connections and shared learning. This was especially recognized when our recent MN Afghan refugees arrived in Minnesota with various language acquisitions. Because of the large network of universal home visitors, we were able to connect Pashto speaking families together, offering a greater sense of belonging and networking – all supporting healthy growth and development for our youngest population.

Increased Connection to Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Because ECFE is under the umbrella of public school districts, there is a strong connection to the school building nurses and social workers – oftentimes the first trusted adults with whom students will share their pregnancy. School nurses and social workers connect students to ECFE for supportive birth planning, focus on healthy pregnancy, healthy births, community resources needed, parenting support, referrals to intensive home visiting and support for finishing school and post-secondary schooling, if desired.

Here are some testimonials received just last week from participants in the universal HUG home visiting program:

“Our visit just ended. As a college student and parent of three children, I am in tears of joy after our visit. After delivering my third child, I felt so alone and frightened about being able to raise my children and finish school. You gave me the confidence and support I needed. Thank you!” – Brooklyn Park mom

“Thank you to my home visitor. She is helping me with understanding the development of my child, positive parenting approaches, connections to other parents and helped me get insurance for me and my baby. I am also now in stable housing and have diapers for my baby. Thank you.” –St. Louis Park mom

“I knew I needed help. I was sad and scared. I was worried about how to take care of my baby. You connected me to a clinic that helped me with my depression. Both my baby and I are happy now.” – Golden Valley mom.

“Wow! As a physician myself, I didn’t know what I didn’t know. Thanks for sharing all these resources and additional community supports with me. I am going to refer all my friends, family and clients to you.” – Maple Grove mom.

I wholeheartedly endorse HF 3886 to support and sustain Universal Home Visiting within the State of Minnesota. I highly recommend ECFE as a critical universal home visiting partner. Research has taught us that the first three years of life are critical years for many reasons. Universal home visiting not only provides universal outreach and support for all families but also increases the connectedness of families to the proactive social determinants of health--increasing healthy growth and development during the most critical infant years. Healthy births, healthy babies, and healthy families create healthy communities.

Thank you for considering and supporting HF 3886. Please feel free to contact me if you should desire additional information.

Respectfully,

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