

Testimony to the 60th Legislature
In Support of In-Home Family Preservation Services
Child & Family Services Division
January 29, 2007

EXHIBIT 5
DATE 1-29-07
HB 2

I am here to urge support of the Child & Family Services budget.

One of the services we offer, Family Based Services (FBS), is funded in part through the "in-home services" portion of the Child & Family Services budget. Funding for this critical service remains flat in the Governor's proposed budget, as it has for several sessions now. I will give you some facts and figures in a minute that justify the increase I believe should be there. But first let me share the testimony of a parent who wanted to be here, but could not come today because of her parental duties.

Gail Hafner, Great Aunt, and now "Mom," to three children writes:

"In October 2003 the Department of Family Services placed our 3 great nieces with my husband and myself. Their ages were at that time 8, 3, and 10 months. We have never had any children of our own, and we faced many challenges and adjustments. Our social worker suggested we work with Friends to Youth [Family Based Services program]. We were connected with Megan from there.

At first she would come into our home and observe our normal daily activities as a family. She helped us set individual goals that were realistic and obtainable. Also she helped me and my husband set ground rules to give the girls a safe and stable environment. The girls looked forward to each visit and they always ended on a positive note. We all felt like we had our own personal "Nanny".

Megan worked with each girl and their issues, and [we] were able to enjoy many family activities together. The individual hands-on training was so helpful because the girls were made to feel comfortable in their own environment, and they were able to be themselves. This program is a very valuable tool to help families in crisis.

The girls had some specific issues that needed some immediate attention, [the oldest] who was 9 at the time was struggling in school socially with her peers who made fun of her because she would act inappropriately. We worked with [her] role playing situation[s] to teach her social skills. [She] has come a long way she keeps making small steps, but without the help and advice we have received, [she] would still be an out cast among her peers. It is hard enough for these; young adults they do not need the baggage their parents have left them with.

[The next oldest] who was 3 when Friends To Youth came into our home. [She] had BIG time attachment issues. She cried, and screamed all of the time [and] threw Huge fits. She was so out of control that she demanded my attention 24 seven; there was no time to spend with the other 2 girls especially her sister [the youngest] who was only 1 years old at that time. We worked on [our middle girl's] attachment issues by holding and talking softly and getting her to talk out her problem [of] why she was so frustrated. [She] especially has come a long way. She continues to battle some of her issues but at least now I have the skills to deal with them. I believe without help [she] would be a lost child.

Without the help of Friends to Youth these girls or others like them may be passed on to other foster homes looking to belong. Even with all of the training having the hands on really gives the guidance to help each child grow into a positive adult. It was so

important for these girls and I am sure as [with] others they stay together as a family because this is what life is about and Friends to Youth teaches this and supports this. People can go into an office and write goals all day long and make suggestions and tell you to go home and work on it, everybody knows if you do not follow through it will never happen. It was so much of a help to have Megan here to observe some of the realities that happen in the home. I have recommended this program to others and will continue to do so, without the tools we were given I do not know where we would be today and most importantly the children.”

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Here are the facts & figures:

- Family preservation services are between 70 and 86% effective.¹
- The results of family preservation services are:
 - Families become healthier as measured by their ability to support each other emotionally, provide for the physical and developmental needs of their children, manage child behavior, and function more independently.
 - Children are more often able to return to or remain in their own families.
 - When children must remain in care they are more often able to receive love and nurture from a family rather than have to go into group or residential care.
- The Department saves money.
 - The cost to the Department for our Family Based Services in FY '06 was \$160,875 (a mix of federal and state dollars).
 - For foster care or higher level of care for those same children the Department would have conservatively spent \$477,309.² This yields a net savings of \$316,434; almost \$2 or every \$1 spent.
- What should be done?
 - Fully fund Child & Family Services – they and the children that depend on them have been starved for adequate funding for far too long.
 - Increase funding for in-home services. Programs like FBS at Friends To Youth are at the limits of sustainability due to rates that are far below cost and over dependence on federal IV-a funding that is far from certain to be there.
- Services Offered by Friends to Youth
 - In FY 2006 Friends to Youth served 108 youth in 53 families.
 - Masters level individual, family, couple and milieu therapy in-the-home.
 - In-home family assessments to support timely permanency planning for children.
 - Skills training in effective parenting, family communication, and child behavior management are brought to the home where the skills can be immediately practiced and reinforced to achieve better outcomes.
 - Concrete help is given to find needed resources for everything from beds to childcare.

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¹ For Friends to Youth, a family based services program in the Missoula area the effectiveness rates for FY 2000 through FY 2006, the yearly rates were 80%, 80%, 79%, 86%, 70%, 75%, & 86%..

² This figure is based on the average cost of the level of care each child would have gone to without the intervention. In some instances our intervention with families prevented any placement. In some instances it helped children return home sooner. And when we intervened with foster, kinship, or adoptive families the savings was based on the predicted level of care that the child(ren) would have graduated to if we had not intervened.