



Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Flathead County

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Good morning. My name is Tim Sievers – T I M S I E V E R S. I am the Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flathead County, based in Kalispell and President of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana, a statewide federation of eight Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies serving 1,789 children in 2012 in 47 schools and 32 communities across the state.

I am joined this morning by several of our agency directors who have traveled from around the state to ask for your support: Becky Webber with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone County; Danette Rector with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Missoula; Colleen Brady with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Helena and Tina Cabbage with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Great Falls. Out of respect for the committee's time I will be speaking on behalf of the federation, though we all are willing to answer questions and serve as a resource to you should you so desire.

On behalf of our agencies and the children we serve, I first want to thank you for your action on Monday to appropriate \$100,000 annually in TANF funds to support the work of our eight agencies. We are grateful for this demonstration of support for our program and for our communities. However, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to say that there still is much work to be done.

Our mission at Big Brothers Big Sisters is to connect youth facing adversity in positive, life-transforming mentoring relationships that change their lives for the better forever. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America has been impacting lives across the country since 1904. With more than 100 years of experience, we are widely recognized as the leading youth mentoring program in America. In fact, the Big Brothers Big Sisters program model has been identified by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as a "Best Practice" model for prevention. This designation affirms what we at Big Brothers Big Sisters already knew, that our model provides safe mentoring relationships with a high probability of success that result in real measurable outcomes – outcomes that benefit the young person being mentored as well as the community in which they live.

Big Brothers Big Sisters' impact has been measured in several studies. In our landmark study, conducted by Public Private Ventures in 1992-93, it was discovered that youth in the program skipped half as many days of school as their peers, felt more competent about doing schoolwork and skipped fewer classes than their peers. Youth that are in school, in class and engaged in their work are more likely to succeed. In 2009, Civic Enterprises conducted a nationwide study of Bigs and Littles in which the following outcomes were reported: 97 percent of Littles said working hard in school is very important; 95 percent said going to school and getting a good education is very important; and 94 percent said graduating from college is very important. We know that youth that work hard, recognize the value of education

and set their aspirations on college are more likely to succeed. Furthermore, in a 2009 study conducted by Harris Interactive of program alumni it was found that 77 percent reported doing better in school because of their mentor; 65 percent agreed their Big helped them reach a higher level of education than they thought possible; and 52 percent agreed their Big kept them from dropping out of high school. We know too that youth that perform well in school, graduate from high school and realize achievements greater than their expectations and are successful in school and in life.

That same landmark study conducted by Public Private Ventures found that youth matched in the program were 46 percent less likely to initiate drug use, 27 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use and one-third less likely to hit someone or engage in other violent behaviors. In the 2009 Harris Interactive study, 90 percent of program alumni said their relationship with their mentor helped them make better choices throughout their childhood; 86 percent said their relationship helped them make better choices throughout their adult life; and significantly, 76 percent said they learned right from wrong from their Big Brother or Big Sister.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a successful program because it impacts and reduces a multitude of risk factors such as alcohol, tobacco and drug use, teen pregnancy, school drop out and violent confrontations while helping children reach their highest potential.

At Big Brothers Big Sisters, we believe that inherent in every child is the ability to succeed and thrive in life. On average, the cost to achieve these outcomes by matching one at-risk youth with one adult mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters for a year is about \$1,000. An investment of \$1,000 annually to mentor a child walking the thin line between success and failure in a best practice prevention program truly is inexpensive. Big Brothers Big Sisters' comprehensive approach to serving children has a higher return of proven outcomes than programs focused on a single issue. Big Brothers Big Sisters intervenes early and targets the youth most likely to end up in the system in their teenage and adult years. This early prevention has a small price tag compared to intervention once problem behaviors have started – interventions that can cost anywhere from \$7,000 annually to more than \$100,000 annually.

In the past, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana has received up to \$360,000 annually through the State of Montana, however, in recent legislative sessions that amount has been reduced to \$50,000 shared between eight agencies. While we are grateful for the \$50,000 appropriation, when divided among the eight agencies we are left with a funding deficit and many children are left on our waiting lists. The reduction in state funding in recent years, coupled with fewer grant opportunities has resulted in fewer at-risk children being matched with an adult mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana. The waiting lists continue to grow and the number of children served continues to decline without adequate funding. In 2006, when Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana received \$90,000 in funding from the Department of Public Health and Human Services Child and Family Services Budget and \$90,000 from the Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program, Big Brothers Big Sisters served more than 3,000 children in 68 communities across the state. As I stated at the beginning of my testimony last year we served about half that number of children. This reduction in services is due in large part to the recession, increased competition for grant funds and a decrease in state funding.

We know there are children and families who want and need to be involved with our program. My agency, together with the others around the state are striving to reduce our waiting lists and once again serve all of the families that stand to benefit from our programs.

We recognize the diverse needs across the state, but we ask that you carefully consider the potential for investing in prevention at this critical time. Our programs have a proven track record and we are a best practice prevention program. We have a strong and positive relationship with the Child and Family Services division at DPHHS and we have been accountable for our spending and our outcomes for years.

As legislators you shoulder a great mantle of responsibility, for the future of our state and for our children who are that future. If you want to make an impact and ensure our children are set on a path to success, funding Big Brothers Big Sisters will do just that. Big Brothers Big Sisters has been a partner with the state in prevention since 1978. With increased funding for our programs once again, we can strengthen that partnership and match many more youth across the state in life-transforming mentoring relationships that change their lives for the better, forever.

Again, thank you for your support and thank you for allowing myself and the many others here today to share our story of hope and success with you.