

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-02-11 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Laura Gill

Email: [laurammaddock@gmail.com](mailto:laurammaddock@gmail.com)

Phone: (406) 443-3083

City, State: Helena, MT

Written Statement: Re: Montana Milestones Part-C Meet Isabelle. She is the sole survivor of Twin-to-Twin-Transfusion Syndrome. Isabelle suffered a massive intrauterine stroke, which resulted in microcephaly, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, cortical visual impairment, chronic constipation and GERD. Isabelle is considered nonverbal, uses a wheelchair for transportation, is not potty trained, requires suction multiple times a day, and is g-tube fed. Isabelle has nine different medications per day, and a minimum of four medical appointments per week.

Despite Isabelle's severe disability and physical and cognitive impairments, she enjoys many typical activities of a two year old. Isabelle loves camping, tubing, hiking, swimming, playing with her brother, reading books and listening to her daddy sing. Early intervention services have allowed us to receive therapy in-home and have been instrumental to Isabelle's well-being, and our family's happiness. Early starts to physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and vision therapy have enabled Isabelle to achieve a higher level of mobility, vision, and communication than we had ever hoped. Trained specialists at Family Outreach have helped navigate us through the special needs world. Without programs like theirs, we would have lost precious time in helping Isabelle achieve her potential.

According to the Centers For Disease Control, "Medical costs for children with both cerebral palsy and intellectual disability were 26 times higher than for children without cerebral palsy or intellectual disability (\$43,338 vs. \$1,674 in 2005 dollars)." Year-to-date (2021 alone), our family's insurance shows 26 claims for our daughter Isabelle, compared to 2 claims for our "typical" son, Patrick. In 2003, the CDC, "has estimated that the lifetime cost to care for an individual with CP is nearly \$1 million dollars," keeping in mind that children like Isabelle only have a 50% probability of making it past 13 years old (National Institute of Health, 2006).

I firmly believe that Isabelle is doing so well because we had access to early intervention, and started those interventions around one month of age. For example, during Isabelle's prenatal brain MRI at Colorado Children's Hospital in 2018, we were told that Isabelle would never, walk, talk, see, hear, or have ANY voluntary movement. Isabelle can see, she can hear, she walks in a gait trainer, and is able to vocally communicate in her own way. "The connections in a baby's brain are most adaptable in the first three years of life. These connections, also called neural circuits, are the foundation for learning, behavior, and health. Over time, these connections become harder to change." (CDC) "What children learn in their first few years of life- and how they learn it- can have long-lasting effects on their success and health as children, teens, and adults." (NIH 2018) According to Amy Tangen, Isabelle's Montana School of Deaf and Blind vision specialist, "Children who have a CVI assessment and a plan for intervention that is paired with functional routines of the day, and is provided throughout the child's day, can have an impactful recovery of the use of vision. On the other hand, if there is no consistent intervention, vision most likely will not improve."

So I'm asking all the parents in this audience: what is your child's vision worth to you? And what price would you put on your child's ability to walk? And most critically, what amount of money would you place on your family's happiness? These questions lie at the heart of all special needs families. Thank you for your time. Colt and Laura Gill

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Position: Proponent  
Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes  
Organization: Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies - The MT Coalition  
Name: Brie MacLaurin, RN  
Email: [brie@hmhb-mt.org](mailto:brie@hmhb-mt.org)  
Phone: (406) 461-0784  
City, State: Helena, MT  
Written Statement: Dear Chair Regier and Committee Members,

My name is Brie MacLaurin and I am the Executive Director of Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies ([www.hmhb-mt.org](http://www.hmhb-mt.org)), a nonprofit that works to improve maternal and child health from pregnancy through age three. I am testifying to express my support of fully funding the Early Childhood & Family Support Division, which is an integral partner in accomplishing our vision of a safe and healthy beginning for all Montana babies. Through home visiting, nutrition assistance, community coalition based prevention programs, home visiting, child care licensing and more, the work of ECFSD provides much needed support to all new families in Montana. As you know, the earliest years of a child's life are critical to building a strong foundation for a healthy life. In light of this, I urge you to fund ECFSD to continue to do this important work to the health and safety of babies, children and families.

Sincerely,  
Brie MacLaurin, RN  
Executive Director  
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies- The Montana Coalition Helena, MT [Brie@hmhb-mt.org](mailto:Brie@hmhb-mt.org)  
(406)449-8611

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Position: Proponent  
Representing an Entity/Another Person: No  
Organization: N/A  
Name: Lindsey Grant  
Email: [lindseygrant242424@gmail.com](mailto:lindseygrant242424@gmail.com)  
Phone: (406) 443-3038  
City, State: Helena, MT  
Written Statement: Re: Montana Milestones Part-C and Family Education and Support The Part C and Family Education and Support services through Family Outreach has helped my son greatly from toilet training to learning skills to communicate. It would be a negative impact on his social and developmental growth to end funding for this program.

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Whitney Mason

Email: [whitney.mason@rocky.edu](mailto:whitney.mason@rocky.edu)

Phone: (406) 443-3083

City, State: Bozeman, MT

Written Statement: Re: Montana Milestones Part-C Service My son was diagnosed with autism when he was 2 years old. Before Part C/FES, we were completely lost. My husband and I had never experienced special needs before and we were looking for guidance and support. This program has helped with school, emotional support for me and my family, helped us finance equipment for him and has helped our son reach his goals. I am forever grateful to the hard working individuals who work for Part C/FES and the help and support they have given us!

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Sara Klein

Email: [sarklein23@gmail.com](mailto:sarklein23@gmail.com)

Phone: (406) 443-3083

City, State: Bozeman, MT

Written Statement: Re: Montana Milestones - Part-C Service

During what can be a very emotional time for a parent, I found Family Outreach to be a great resource. Family Outreach helps to provide a clear path that you can take your child on. They also provide the resources that a parent will need outside of what Family Outreach directly offers. For instance making sure that I had a meeting setup with Sara Jones a few months before my children turn 3 to start having the conversation about preschool. Having one place to go to has been extremely helpful and I am grateful they have been a resource to me and my family.

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Bri Vold

Email: [hoofprints\\_inthesand@hotmail.com](mailto:hoofprints_inthesand@hotmail.com)

Phone: (406) 443-3083

City, State: Bozeman, MT

Written Statement: Shortly after we came home from the NICU with our daughter, who was born with T21, we were put in contact with Family Outreach. Skeptical at first letting someone into our personal family journey, and after giving it some thought, we agreed to give it a try.

We were matched with a family support specialist and were blown away at the resources and support provided that we didn't even know we needed!

Over the last couple years, we've been through open heart surgery, medical care, and navigating therapies needed for our daughter to thrive. Our FSS has been available to us throughout the process as our liaison and guide into the outside world. She's provided insight, information, and also taken care of the paperwork needed to cover unexpected costs associated with therapies, services, and medical travel, making the stress load so much more bearable for our family.

Family Outreach is an outstanding organization, and we are so very thankful we've been able to connect. Our daughters care, and the needs of our children come first, and always will. Family Outreach gets that, and makes it possible to achieve goals that in an ordinary world, would be deemed unachievable.

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Position: Informational Witness

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Montana Child Protection Alliance

Name: Denise Johnson

Email: [ron\\_denise@hotmail.com](mailto:ron_denise@hotmail.com)

Phone: (406) 545-9381

City, State: Billings

Written Statement: Dear Honorable Committee Members:

On behalf of Montana's children, the first priority of our state is to fund the implementation of the Family First Act. Preventative services are critical to ensuring the long-term health and safety of children in Montana and is far less costly than foster care. Programs that include support services for substance abuse and mental health are especially important. Quality programs reduce recidivism and individuals require less services. By investing in prevention, we can reduce the long-term societal costs since children who spend time in foster care are dramatically more likely to be incarcerated, homeless, unemployed, and suffer from mental health issues.

Family First provides funding for necessary training of staff to ensure that the mindset is directed toward prevention and preservation rather than removal. We would encourage full use of these funds along with funds to ensure yearly continuing education. It would also be prudent to better compensate CFSD workers who are licensed social workers to attract higher quality workers while creating a new level of accountability to a licensing board. Additionally, we would recommend the following:

- Advocacy efforts for families on the front-end have been proven to dramatically improve outcomes for children while saving state money. The Quality representation program in Washington State has proven to be very effective with a return on investment of over 100%. Quality representation protects due process while reducing overwhelming court experiences, resulting in fair outcomes for families and their children. The Iowa Parent Peer program is seeing returns on investment of 436%. The Casey Family Foundation has been instrumental in bringing programs such as these on board thus we suggest continuing to work with them to create long-term reform.
- The current case management data system has drained millions from our state over the course of years and yet, it seems to be inefficient and incomplete. The CAPS data system currently used by CFSD allows data to be easily manipulated to dodge transparency. It is time to stop feeding a sink hole and purchase a new system that is efficient and transparent. This needs to be included in the CFSD budget. We are surprised that replacing it wasn't prioritized before now. Efficiencies in case management means our children won't waste their lives waiting on paperwork and cumbersome processes. Children have actually been removed and then case files couldn't be located, creating uncertainty as to where the child was. That should never happen.
- Priorities need to be placed on a conflict resolution process. Current MCA codes allow for Citizen Review panels that are "subject to availability of funds" thus not being utilized. The only consistent forum, the State Advisory Council has not been solution driven. Additionally, there is not an effective complaint process nor a position to oversee this within CFSD. Effective citizen councils and conflict resolution processes would create efficiencies in the courts and legislature while providing better outcomes for families.
- There is a lack of transparency and accountability of funding within CFSD. How much is coming in for each child and how is it being spent? Are funds used to serve children and families or piled into the general fund? It is time to complete a forensic audit of DPHHS funding. We also need to audit the actual number of children in MT foster care since the Center for Missing and Exploited Children has identified that 85% of children rescued from sex trafficking in the nation are from the child welfare system. Trafficking is happening in MT.

- We also recommend transparency and accountability of DPHHS contracts. These contracts should be public facing and reviewed for quality and competitiveness regularly. However, restricting services to only those under contract is limiting the availability of much needed services and in some cases, favors government programs that should be awarded on a competitive bid process and operated in the private sector.
- Top-heavy administration needs to be streamlined so that there are adequate resources on the front-line to serve the public. Some employees are not right for the positions they hold which creates a lack of results and productivity. We see situations where employees treat families with cruelty rather than compassion and collaboration in problem solving. These workers need to be replaced and moved to positions where they can't injure families.
- Focus on ways to provide training that improves the lives of children and families. Real life experiences can do more to heal than sitting in therapy for hours or websites with helpful hints. We're going to need work hard to ensure that we use our resources to serve people, not to make processes that create more systems. Montana families are desperate to move beyond the status quo where generations cycles through our broken foster care system.

Although there are great efficiencies to be realized within the DPHHS budget, we will need to invest in more effective programs that create lifechanging outcomes so that we can shed the shameful position of being 2nd highest in the nation for the number of children in foster care/capita.

This is a huge subject to cover in a brief letter, we hope this has been helpful. Thank you for the opportunity to present some ideas from the perspective of our families and children. We welcome an opportunity to work with you to find solutions for the good people of Montana.

Sincerely,

Matt Furlong – President of the Montana Child Protection Alliance (406) 202-0544 Denise Johnson – Communications Director of the Montana Child Protection Alliance (406) 545-9381

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Lindsay Lalonde

Email: [lindsay.cat.lalonde@gmail.com](mailto:lindsay.cat.lalonde@gmail.com)

Phone: (406) 781-7511

City, State: Great Falls

Written Statement: As a recipient of funds and assistance for childcare and, a current program participant in the Parents as Teachers program, Cascade County DPHHS funding has provided essential and life changing assistance for my family over the course of 2020. It's due to the continued efforts and funding provided by DPHHS and it's programs that parents such as myself can provide a stable and solid foundation for the current and future generations of Great Falls families, and an economically positive impact on our community as a whole.

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Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Nurturing Center- Montana R&R Network Region 1

Name: Renee August

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Phone: (046) 309-1797

City, State: Kalispell, MT

Written Statement: I am speaking to express my support for the Early Childhood and Family Support Division's (ECFSD) budget. The STARS program mission is to build high quality early care and education programs throughout the state of Montana. As a previous STARS program Director and recipient of STARS funding, this helped grow the program and staff and purchase high quality materials that we may not have been able to otherwise. As a previous program Director, I also know the importance of the Best Beginnings Scholarships that have allowed families to work or go to school and their children to attend quality childcare programs that they might not have been able to attend without the scholarship.

As a STARS Consultant I have watched STARS programs grow their by being able to expand, add more children to their programs, and retain and grow staff professionally.

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Child Care Connections

Name: Brandi L. Thomas

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Phone: (406) 587-7786

City, State: Helena

Written Statement: Public Testimony: HB 2 The Early Childhood and Family Support Division's (ECFSD) Joint Appropriations Subcommittee for Health and Human Services Proponent

Chairman Regier,

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Brandi Thomas, I represent Child Care Connections, the only Child Care Resource and Referral agency serving Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater, Gallatin, Park, and Meager counties. Although I am representing Child Care Connections, I am also a parent and grandparent. I have worked in the early childhood education system for 20 years in various roles including Infant/Toddler caregiver, Preschool Teacher, director of a childcare program, Child and Adult Care Food Program monitor, and Provider Services coordinator. I continue to work with Child Care providers daily.

We are in full support of the Early Childhood and Family Support Division and hope that this new division receives the funding it needs to serve the children and families in Montana. In all my years of working with children and families, it was confusing and unfortunate that the state agencies working for Montana's young children and families were separated. This caused programs to silo and our services to these children and families suffered.

With this division forming and the agencies coming together there has been better communication, collaboration, and alignment. Programs such as ECSB and Child Care licensing working together to align practices and work within the Child Care Development Block Grant has resulting in clearer guidance to Resource and Referral agencies and better outcomes for Montana's childcare providers and children. This is only one example of many of how this division is working to better provide services to children.

During a crisis such as COVID, programs within the new division were able to work together to apply for waivers, distribute funding, and collaborate on new policies and procedures. In the past I believe this team effort would have been harder to accomplish and more cumbersome. Through COVID, it has been demonstrated how important having programs together under the same division has been beneficial.

Again, please secure funding for the Early Childhood and Family Support Division.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.



Family Connections of Montana should be awarded this funding for several reasons. One of which is they are very efficient at supplying educational classes to further the knowledge of the childcare providers within the program. Another reason is they fully support the families, children, and staff at each facility. Finally, they acknowledge the importance of having a safe, loving, and caring environment for children to thrive.

Thank you,

Lolly Wahl

Lolly's Day Care

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-02-11 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: SKC Early Learning Center

Name: Janet Jolley

Email: [Janet\\_jolley@skc.edu](mailto:Janet_jolley@skc.edu)

Phone: (406) 675-8475

City, State: Polson

Written Statement: I am speaking in support of the the Early Childhood and Family Support Division's (ECFSD) budget. I am an Early Childhood Educator who has spent more then 40 years in the profession, teaching and acting as an administrator. Presently I am the Director of SKC Early Learning Center which serves the children(ages 2-8) primarily for the student's and faculty of Salish Kootenai College. We are also a lab school for Early Childhood Educators who attend Salish Kootenai College. Best Beginnings Scholarships allow the students who might not otherwise be able to afford childcare, to bring their children to a safe, quality learning environment. STARS to quality has provided funding for us to improve our program by adding new materials, replacing old broken items and creating innovative learning environments that meet the needs of the children we serve. STARS to quality also provides funding for annual training for our staff including attending conferences, supporting required training and providing coaching support for improved learning environments and quality interactions.



Mr. Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Patrick Maddison and I am a CEO for community-based provider agencies as well as the Board President for the Montana Association of Community Disability Services (MACDS), our association is comprised of thirty-three community-based organizations in MT that provide residential, employment, day services to adults with disabilities and early intervention and family education support services to children with disabilities.

The Early Childhood, Early Intervention and Family Education and Support-services deliver critical early intervention services to children struggling to meet developmental milestones or diagnosed with a long-term disability. Early Childhood and Family Education Support providers coach families in how to support their child working towards reaching developmental milestones by use of best practices and service coordination with specialized treatment providers such as Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, schools, medical providers and other specialized treatment providers.

These early interventions have the power to change the trajectory of a child's and family's lives. Early intervention services provided consistently will decrease the dependency on more intensive adult services. Early intervention may also completely remove the need of specialized school services and long term adult services. Early intervention services are an investment in children, families, adult providers and our communities. The return on investment for MT tax payers is a reduction in the need for long term adult services. Thank you for recognizing and valuing children with disabilities, their families and the providers who walk with them through this journey.

Sincerely,

Patrick Maddison, MACDS Board President