

Testimony on House Bill 119
Before the House Human Services Subcommittee
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Mr. Chairman and members of the House Human Services Subcommittee, my name is Stephanie Perdue and I would like to begin by thanking everyone for spending their day here and allowing myself and others to share their stories.

This is my testimony on the very crucial early intervention programming that Cuyahoga County and the State of Ohio are currently funding. My husband, Garry, and I have a strong, supportive marriage and were blessed with our son, Timothy Jordan, three and half years ago. My pregnancy was happy and basically healthy through the first two trimesters. During my third trimester, I began having some minor problems that were treatable. I found out I had Gestational Diabetes. I was not producing enough sugar for my son to grow to a healthy weight. I was closely monitored and at 7 months gestation Timmy was only about 2.5 to 3 pounds. I began taking some sugar additives and increased my diet and Timmy grew. He was born just a few days shy of his expected date of arrival and was a healthy 6 pounds 12 ounces.

The hospital had asked if I wanted a nurse to visit my home after discharge and I accepted. I figured since I was a first time mom, the nurse would be a great visit. The nurse came to my home and was excellent. She answered my questions and checked Timmy. Timmy was progressing good and had regularly scheduled doctor visits. At about 7 months, Timmy began to struggle with his development. Timmy was not eating the different stages of food. Every time I offered Timmy thicker type foods, he would gag and eventually projectile vomited. My doctor thought he may have Tactile Sensory Disorder. After seeing specialists at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland, Timmy was officially diagnosed. Timmy struggled with eating past his second birthday. Timmy had other struggles as well. Timmy was having trouble with his respiratory system causing him to have multiple ear infections before he was 18 months, croup cough, and repeated episodes of pneumonia which he still struggles with today. This results in multiple hospital visits and stays. Timmy was non-verbal and his speech was severely delayed.

How did Timmy begin to overcome his struggles? Timmy went to his 24 month well visit at the doctor's office. She told me about a program called Help Me Grow. My initial thought was that I would never qualify. My husband and I make way to much money and we live with family so our rent and bills weren't nearly as much as they could have been. My doctor still encouraged me to call. I did finally call. This began the amazing journey to helping Timmy. A Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, and a

Service Coordinator came to my house within a week and evaluated Timmy. They determine he qualified and my income or benefits would not be affected. I was amazed. He received services for about a year. When Timmy was approaching three years old, the Service Coordinator began talking about the need to transition into our school district's program. I was terrified. Here is my little child who is sick so easily and barely eating solid foods, going to school. I went on multiple visits to his First Step Preschool and met with countless people. My Help Me Grow Service Coordinator was always with me. She came to all my meetings and helped Timmy transition to his school. She was like an angel encouraging a scared mother. First Step Preschool has been able to keep his class size smaller than most classes. Timmy has 8 friends in his classroom. He has 4 friends who are peer models and 4 friends with disabilities. There are two teachers and a sign language aide. The sign aide assists 2 friends and Timmy specifically. Timmy receives 2 hours of Speech Therapy a week at First Step. Timmy has been at First Step since October 2006 and in 6 months he is now able to communicate roughly 50% verbally. He still relies on some sign language, but not nearly as much as before.

Timmy is just one child that services have been able to help with the Help Me Grow program. If Help Me Grow can assist with major life changing events such as Timmy's story, this demonstrates success and achievement. There are so many families that need assistance and do not know that they can qualify and receive services. My family struggled for 2 years and thought we were alone. When looking at the facts, we were never alone. Help Me Grow was always there. They provided the initial home visit nurse and made sure that doctors were aware of their services. Money provided can expand Help Me Grow services to so many families. It can be introduced into the community more and help families not feel alone. I encourage everyone to think of the children and want what is in their best interest. These children can not be successful without programs such as Help Me Grow and their successes are our nation's future.

Thank you for your time and interest in Timmy. Thank you for supporting Help Me Grow and to help our children. Have a blessed day.