

**Testimony in Support of SB25-017**  
**Provided by Laura Luzietti, MD, FAAP**  
**Executive Director, Every Child Pediatrics**  
**March 12, 2025**

My name is Dr. Laura Luzietti, I am a pediatrician and the Executive Director of Every Child Pediatrics. I am here today to urge your support of SB25-017.

There is increasing evidence that the first few years of a child's life are particularly sensitive in the process of development, laying the foundation for the child's brain architecture, physical health, cognitive functioning, social and emotional wellbeing, self-regulation and behavior. Missed opportunities and exposure to toxic stress early in life can have long-term negative consequences including developmental delays, behavioral issues, child abuse, low literacy, and health and safety issues.

Adults with more adverse experiences in early childhood are also more likely to struggle with physical, social and mental health issues that impact their capacity for consistent, appropriate and responsive caregiving to infants and toddlers.

Children develop and thrive within the context of nurturing and responsive relationships and positive experiences. Interventions, supports and connections during the first three years mitigate the factors that place children at risk for poor outcomes. Prevention and promotion models in early childhood, offered within pediatric primary care, like HealthySteps, provide a two-generational approach, aligning direct care and intervention for the child with support to the caregiver within the context of trusting relationships.

Programs, like HealthySteps, support improved outcomes, including greater adherence to well-child visits, increased vaccination rates, increased breastfeeding and age-appropriate nutrition, increased understanding of child development & behavior, increased use of positive parenting approaches, increased child safety practices, increased use of available services to address family needs, improved maternal health, increased parental self-efficacy & competency, increased family security and more. (HS Evidence Summary 2024) As we identify and support children and families who are most at risk as early as possible, we hope to reduce or avoid the need for costly and less effective remediation and supports later in life.

For these reasons, I ask for your support of SB25-017. Thank you for your consideration.

# SB25-017: Measures to Support Early Childhood

Senator Cutter

## Committee Testimony

### Senate Health and Human Services Committee

March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Melissa Mares, Director of Early Childhood

- Hello, members of the committee. I am Melissa Mares, Director of Early Childhood at the Colorado Children's Campaign. The Children's Campaign is a nonpartisan policy organization that leverages data and research to unapologetically advocate for kids.
- Thank you to Senator Cutter for carrying this legislation and thank you all for reading my testimony today.
- The Children's Campaign supports Senate Bill 017 because it brings Colorado in line with national best practices in early childhood health and wellbeing. The bill codifies two vitally important programs in statute: Child Care Health Consultation and HealthySteps.
- Early childhood is a critically important time for child development; young children form more than one million neural connections *every second* in their first years of life. This is the time to invest in children and families, especially those who most need support, to set them up for long-term success.
- Together, Child Care Health Consultation and HealthySteps support high quality child care and healthy child development, identifying developmental concerns and providing interventions and support to families as soon as possible.
- Child Care Health Consultants promote inclusion of children with any type of health needs in child care settings and train providers on best practices to serve all children in their care, improving the quality of child care in Colorado.
- HealthySteps is an evidence-based, primary care program that is focused on child development and provides direct support to families in pediatric settings. Over 38,000 children in Colorado benefit from this program today.
- Senate Bill 017 is a step in the right direction to ensure that our early childhood system is truly comprehensive. Colorado must stay true to our shared vision of a whole child, whole family approach to these important early childhood years.
- SB 017 supports families' access to essential health services, meeting them where they are and setting their children up for lifelong success. Codifying these programs in statute is a recognition of their essential role in our early childhood ecosystem.
- We urge you to support this legislation and the families it will help. Thank you!



Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

My name is Lex Loutzenhiser, and I'm a Policy Manager with Illuminate Colorado, a statewide nonprofit working to strengthen families, organizations, and communities to prevent child maltreatment. I am submitting testimony in support of **SB25-017 Measures to Support Early Childhood**. When families have access to services that promote healthy child development, we build a foundation for families to thrive. I want to highlight two particular reasons Illuminate supports this bill:

1. **This bill promotes proven protective factors to prevent child maltreatment.** Research shows that building knowledge of parenting and child development, a protective factor, has the power to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.<sup>1</sup> Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs) work with child care providers and parents to promote understanding of healthy child development and development-appropriate educational tools and resources. HealthySteps is an evidence-based program that promotes access to referrals and supports by offering developmental screenings and connecting families to services that support children in meeting developmental milestones.
2. **Child Care Health Consultants and HealthySteps promote family health and wellbeing.** Studies show that CCHCs promote health and wellbeing, both in and out of the child care settings. CCHCs have been shown to enhance the quality of child care settings by increasing adherence to health & safety guidelines, increasing educator and provider confidence in supporting children's needs, and enhancing the use of age-appropriate screenings to address children's developmental needs, while increasing families' establishment of regular medical and dental providers.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that HealthySteps promotes ongoing health and wellbeing of the entire family. Children who receive HealthySteps are more likely to have increased social-emotional competence, receive timely future healthcare, while caregivers are more likely to utilize safe sleep practices, receive ongoing postpartum care, and experience decreased rates of maternal depression.<sup>3</sup>

SB25-017 would codify Child Care Health Consultants and clarify HealthySteps within statute to support future growth and access to these services. In closing, when families have access to information and supports to better understand health parenting and child development, we strengthen the foundation for families to thrive. **We urge you to support access to services that promote healthy child development and family wellbeing by voting 'yes' on SB25-017.**

Sincerely,

Lex Loutzenhiser, Policy Manager

[lloutzenhiser@illuminatecolorado.org](mailto:lloutzenhiser@illuminatecolorado.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Center for the Study of Social Policy. (n.d.) About Strengthening Families and the protective factors framework. Retrieved From: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/>

<sup>2</sup> United States. Maternal and Child Health Bureau. (2006). *The influence of child care health consultants in promoting children's health and well-being: A report on selected resources*. Education Development Center, Healthy Child Care Consultant Network Support Center. Retrieved From: <https://cardeaservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CClitreviewPrintAll.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> HealthySteps. (2021). HealthySteps Evidence Summary. Retrieved From: <https://www.healthysteps.org/resource/healthysteps-outcomes-summary>



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Submitted on February 5, 2025.

Testimony on Bill #SB25-017: Measures to Support Early Childhood Health  
on February 5, 2025, at Upon Adjournment in front of the Health & Human Services

From: Ealasha Vaughner

Submitted on: February 5, 2025.

Testimony in support of SB25-017: Measures to Support Early Childhood Health

Submitted to: Health & Human Services

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ealasha Vaughner, and I am the Manager of Policy & Advocacy at Clayton Early Learning. I am honored to be here today on behalf of myself, Clayton's Parents, Clayton Community members, and Clayton Early Learning to request your support for Senate Bill 25-017.

At Clayton Early Learning, we are proud to serve over 500 families annually through a holistic, multi-generational approach to early childhood education and care. Our mission is to work in partnership with families to advance systems change that cultivates the whole child, whole family approach to the early years. As one of the largest providers of Head Start services in Colorado, we are deeply committed to cultivating equitable opportunities for young children to thrive and for families to experience overall well-being.

Early childhood, particularly from birth to age five, is the most critical period of development. During this time, a child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth shapes their lifelong trajectory. Unfortunately, many of Colorado's youngest children are not receiving timely developmental screenings or the services they need for healthy growth. This gap in services leads to challenges for families, including limited access to childcare, exclusion from vital programs, and children falling behind in meeting key developmental milestones. We see this firsthand at Clayton with the parents and families we serve.

SB25-017 directly addresses these challenges by strengthening and expanding two essential, community-based programs: Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs) and HealthySteps. These programs are designed to meet families where they already are, within community settings, allowing for a more integrated approach to early childhood health. They are also equity-focused, ensuring that all children, regardless of

background or circumstance, receive the care and support they deserve. Additionally, these programs have a proven track record of success, helping both children and families achieve healthier outcomes.

By codifying and strengthening these programs, SB25-017 aligns Colorado with national best practices in early childhood health. The bill is crucial to ensuring that all families in our state have access to the necessary resources and services for their children's optimal development.

I strongly urge you to support SB25-017. By doing so, you are investing in the health and well-being of our youngest Coloradans, and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Ealasha Vaughner  
Manager of Policy & Advocacy  
Clayton Early Learning

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Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Ealasha Vaughner  
Manager of Policy & Advocacy  
Clayton Early Learning

## Testimony of Meg Tomcho, MD, FAAP

SB25-017

March 12, 2025

Good afternoon, Madame Chair, and members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Meg Tomcho. I am here today on behalf of myself and the American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter. On behalf of our over 800 pediatric professionals from across the state, I ask for your support of Senate Bill 25-017 Measures to Support Early Childhood Health.

The prenatal period through age 3 years of life is the most critical time for child's brain development. More than one million neural connections are formed every second during these first few years building the foundation for healthy cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development as children grow. The relationships created for a child during this time build the foundations for health, learning, and social well-being. The capacities developed by children during this critical period form the basis for a strong and prosperous society. **I urge you to support SB25-017 because investments made during early childhood can have a significant positive impact on the trajectory of a child's life and the trajectory of a community.**

Pediatric clinicians have unprecedented access to children and families. From birth, families seek regular well child care with their pediatrician. New parents and caregivers attend 12-13 well-child visits in a child's first three years—that's at least 12 opportunities to impact a child's future and get them started on the right path to be future contributors to our society. No other system has the same consistent and positive connections to families and their young children or stands to make this type of broad-scale influence on our collective prosperity. Despite the evidence of the impacts that can be made during this critical period in a child's development, many Colorado children are not on track to reach healthy developmental milestones due to lack of preventive care and early intervention services. Sadly, many Colorado families do not have access to critical supports like HealthySteps.

HealthySteps is a program that partners with pediatric primary care to emphasize and focus on key social, emotional, and cognitive skills critical for healthy development. The components of programs like HealthySteps supports the whole family where they are in community settings through on site care coordination and integrated interventions such as addressing abnormal developmental screenings in clinic. These interventions strengthen young children, families, and in turn strengthen our communities.

As a primary care pediatrician, I have seen first hand the invaluable contributions for children, their families, and our communities from the integration of HealthySteps in the pediatric medical home. One example stands out in my mind as a highlight of how HealthySteps can provide substantial benefit. I was the pediatrician for an infant whose mom was going through major social stressors after the infant's birth. The HealthySteps specialist was able to spend time with the mom building her skills as a parent and helping her understand the child's development. The HealthySteps specialist built a relationship with the mom that extended for the first 3 years of the child's life and allowed the child and mom to bond and grow together. The mom gained confidence in her skills as a parent and was able to seek needed benefits for her family with the support of the HealthySteps team.

I strongly believe that all of Colorado's children and families should benefit from the collaboration between pediatricians and these skilled HealthySteps professionals.

On behalf of AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) Colorado and families and young children across our state who will benefit from this important legislation, I want to thank the sponsors of this critically important bill and urge the Committee to vote yes in support of SB25-017.

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