



**Testimony for the FY2027 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services
Submitted by: Elizabeth Isakson, MD, Executive Director, Docs for Tots
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Help Me Grow New York. Docs for Tots has a two-pronged role regarding Help Me Grow – both organizing Help Me Grow Long Island and serving as a unifying entity for Help Me Grow New York supporting statewide expansion. Help Me Grow New York is a vital component of New York State’s primary prevention system, strengthening children and families through community-level support.

We urge the legislature to fund Help Me Grow New York at \$1,500,000 to maintain and expand this nationally recognized, evidence-based model, improving early developmental health and family well-being.

The foundation for thriving families and the greatest opportunity for primary prevention begins during pregnancy and early childhood. Experiences in the first five years of life have a lasting impact, shaping health, development, and well-being across the lifespan. New York’s recent investments in early childhood, including the expansion of childcare, are exciting opportunities. However, persistent challenges in early intervention systems and shifting federal investments underscore the need for effective, efficient, and evidence-based approaches. Help Me Grow plays a critical role in strengthening early developmental supports, improving outcomes for New York’s youngest children, and fostering the success of tomorrow’s citizens.

Help Me Grow is a national model that works across sectors (human services, health care, childcare) and builds on existing resources to promote child development. Help me Grow has robust partnerships with pediatricians, childcare and Head Start providers, school districts, and county governments. Successful implementation of the Help Me Grow model requires communities to identify existing resources, think creatively about how to make the most of existing opportunities, and build a coalition to work collaboratively toward a shared agenda.

Since 2017 Help Me Grow New York has been able to expand to 17 counties and assists 15 additional counties through technical support. Help Me Grow New York is organized at the regional and county level: Western New York (8 Counties), Finger Lakes (4 Counties), Long Island (2 Counties), Oswego County, Herkimer County and Onondaga County. In addition, Help Me Grow provided support to 15 additional counties that are preparing to incorporate and launch Help Me Grow into their communities.

An investment in Help Me Grow:

- **Strengthens family capacity:** Help Me Grow recognizes families as central to a child's development and provides them with guidance, education, and referrals that empower caregivers to understand, support and nurture their child's developmental needs.

"I am a special education teacher, and I didn't realize how paralyzed I would be when it was my own child needing to go through this process. My Help Me Grow Family Resource Specialist is a resource for ME." - Long Island Parent

- **Improves navigation of services:** Help Me Grow serves as a centralized access point, connecting families to health, developmental and social services across the community. This streamlined navigation reduces barriers and creates more efficient access to support that meets their child's basic and developmental needs. *Families reported >95% of needs met after using Help Me Grow.*
- **Fosters cross-sector collaboration:** Help Me Grow promotes coordination among healthcare providers, educators, community-based organizations and families. This collaboration strengthens the local early childhood system and ensures a more integrated comprehensive approach to healthy development. *In New York State last year, Help Me Grow received 440 referrals from Health Care Professionals, worked with 235 Community Childcare Programs and 540 Health Care Professionals, and connected 2,500 families to services.*
- **Builds on existing state initiatives:** Help Me Grow complements and enhances current state efforts, such as the *Childcare Expansion Pilot, Early Intervention Programs*, and system building efforts of the *New York State Council on Children and Families B-5 Initiative* and *ECCS grant*.
- **Delivers free evidence-based support to families:** Help Me Grow provides *free services* grounded in evidence-based practice. Investments in early childhood yield long-term savings by identifying and addressing concerns early, reducing the need for more intensive and costly interventions later in life.

Families with young children struggle to access childcare, early intervention services, preschool special education, timely SNAP benefits, and other resources. Help Me Grow's community expertise in available services bridges the connection gap allowing families with children under five to successfully navigate systems.

An investment of \$1,500,000 in Help Me Grow will significantly benefit children from birth to age five across New York State. Help Me Grow is a proven prevention model that brings communities together to strengthen families and ensure that all children have a healthy start.

Thank you for considering our testimony.

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