

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 166
House Finance Committee
Margo Spence, President & CEO, First Step Home
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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Margo Spence, President & CEO of First Step Home located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 166.

You have heard testimony from Medicaid Director Corcoran that “the 1115 waiver is presenting opportunities to improve clinical consistency while measuring service outcomes and performance, and it is a potential vehicle to improve care for pregnant women with opioid use disorder and their infants, some of whom may have neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).” Director Corcoran testified clinical evidence that suggests that optimal care for a mother with opioid use disorder and/or a baby with NAS includes allowing moms and babies to stay together. I am here to tell you that is exactly what we are doing at First Step Home, day in and day out.

First Step Home was founded in 1993 in the lower Price Hill neighborhood of Cincinnati by a group of women in recovery for women to live together with their children up to the age of twelve. Twenty-six years later, First Step Home has helped thousands of women recover from addiction through a dedicated staff, board and advisory board. We provide trauma-informed treatment for pregnant and non-pregnant women with substance use disorder living with their children up to the age of twelve. The organization has transformed over the years – and has responded to different needs within the community – while always staying true to our roots of helping our original mission of helping women recover from addiction while staying together with their children.

First Step Home provides evidence-based addiction treatment programs with appropriate supports for mothers in recovery while living together with their babies and children. We provide a critical layer of wraparound services for mothers and their babies including clinical nursing care; post-partum care, parenting classes, including breast feeding classes; housing support, both on campus and outside of the direct campus setting; vocational educational and training services for the majority of our clients; as well as trauma informed care both in groups and individual counseling services. Key partners include Good Samaritan Hospital, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and Child Protective Services.

We created our Maternal Addiction Program six years ago for women who are pregnant or have babies up to one year old. The Maternal Addiction Program addresses the very difficult period before and after birth for both moms and babies. Our organization is uniquely positioned to serve this vulnerable population of women who have been living below the poverty line, who have been addicted to opiates (and other substances) and who are at risk for losing their babies to Child Protective Services, by providing significant medical and behavioral health services for mother and baby. The mother’s physical and

mental health is vital to the baby because a healthy mom translates to a cared for baby – one less likely to go into the CPS foster care system.

Based on continued research from Good Samaritan Hospital and our internal data, 75% of our clients maintain abstinence during their first 30 days during treatment after the birth of their babies. One hundred percent of their babies are treated for symptoms of withdrawal or Natal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) by a nurse while at First Step Home and we have increased the number of babies that return from hospitals with their mothers through collaboration with Child Protective Services. In 2018, we served over 150 women involved with the Maternal Addiction Program, we assisted in helping with 55 births and served a total of 80 children including older children up to the age of twelve.

We help moms strive for sobriety and newborns cope with opiate exposure in utero and withdrawal symptoms. We offer our clients objective medical care as early in the pregnancy as possible through the birth. Nurses check on moms and babies weekly to assess physical and mental health and provide clinical care to meet ongoing needs. Care in our programs with a healthy environment improves the chance that the mother maintains sobriety and that the baby is not placed in foster care.

Opiate-exposed babies and their mothers have been coming home together after delivery, healthy and abstinent, with First Step Home considered a safe place for women to come for treatment with their newborns by CPS, called a ‘safety plan.’ Results include:

- An increase in the percentage of new mothers who successfully complete 30 days of abstinence to 75% from 65% a year ago. According to the American Addiction Centers, actual abstinence figures vary widely state by state and even county by county. Most states indicate a success rate of approximately 30% for all clients. We believe we have a significantly larger percentage due to the women who are trying to stay clean to keep their babies and children
- A decrease in the number of babies being placed in foster care by CPS
- Reuniting NICU babies with mothers earlier after birth. In our Maternal Addiction Program, we are able to reunite 35 mothers with their children.
- Of the women exiting our program during 2018, 85% had negative drug screens. In addition, 98% had a primary care provider and 100% had a pediatric provider. We treated 150 women in the Maternal Addiction Program.
- Of the births during 2018, 43% percent of the babies were born with NAS symptoms and 67% had Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement. However, due to First Step Home’s relationship with CPS and our designation as a place of safety for clients with newborns who are in treatment, 81% of the babies returned with their mother and only 14% were placed in foster care. The other 5% were placed with family of the child.

Finally, you may have seen a report in Monday’s Cincinnati Enquirer regarding results of the Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative showing that fewer infants needed treatment drugs and those who did needed a shorter treatment period. I am proud that First Step Home is actively involved in this Collaborative through our Medical Director as well as some of the infants referenced are our kids.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your commitment to ongoing investments in evidence-based treatment protocols. I strongly encourage the General Assembly to support Governor DeWine and Director Corcoran's request for funds to leverage federal dollars to expand protocols that keep moms and their children together as they receive treatment.