



THOMAS WEST

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Sponsor testimony – House Bill 40 (As prepared)

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and my colleagues of the House Health Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 40.

HB 40 requires that health care professionals offer HIV, syphilis, and gonorrhea tests to a woman during her first appointment related to her pregnancy, and again at the beginning of the third trimester if the woman has partaken in activities posing a risk of infection with HIV, syphilis, or gonorrhea. The health care professional is specifically required to inform the woman of her right to refuse the tests if she does not want them.

Women and their infants are uniquely vulnerable to the consequences of sexual transmitted infections. According to the CDC, chlamydia and gonorrhea disproportionately affect women because early infection may be asymptomatic. Similarly to non-pregnant women, a high proportion of pregnant women with chlamydial and gonococcal infections are asymptomatic.

Rep. Galonski will go into detail regarding these infections and the myriad of serious health issues it can cause in infants. Syphilis has long been known to be an important risk factor for adverse pregnancy outcomes, with the consequences including fetal death, preterm birth, and also congenital infection in a proportion of surviving infants resulting in both physical and mental developmental disabilities. According to the CDC, cases of congenital syphilis has been on the rise since 2012.

Most cases of congenital syphilis are easily preventable if women are screened for syphilis and treated early during prenatal care, which is why House Bill 40 would play an important role in improving maternal and fetal outcomes in Ohio.

It is important to note that not all women will go to a primary care doctor when they first find out they are pregnant. Many women have different points of entry into the healthcare system, which is why it is important for us to require various healthcare professionals to offer STD testing so that more women have the opportunity to be tested during different trimesters of their pregnancy.

We hope this bill can be part of a comprehensive effort to reduce the inequities in the infant mortality rate and improve the lives of Ohio families. I will now pass it on to Rep. Galonski. Thank you for your time. We can answer any questions the committee may have following Rep. Galonski's testimony.