

Chair Brinkman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Boggs, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Insurance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today in support of Ohio House Bill 91, the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act.

My name is Tracy Nájera and I'm the executive director of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. CDF-Ohio understands that children don't come in pieces and neither should our policies and funding. At CDF-Ohio, we are focused on the needs of all children – especially our most vulnerable, which means that we are also concerned about the families that these children live in. As you are well aware, the state of Ohio has abysmal infant mortality rates – especially amongst Black babies. Further, we have a high percentage of babies who are born with high risk indicators – such as low birth rates and pre-term. As a state, Ohio has made significant investments to ensure that our most vulnerable mothers and babies have the support they need, such as the additional \$69.7 million invested in evidence-based home visiting. An important tool that the state could also use to combat our infant mortality crisis is taking action on paid family and medical leave. A [2011 study](#) conducted of low and middle income countries found that each month of paid maternity leave was associated with a 13 percent decrease in infant mortality. The research is clear. When parents have access to paid family and medical leave, the infant mortality rate drops.

What we have right now isn't working and is out of touch with the reality of Ohio's working families in the 21st century. The only national caregiving and medical leave policy that exists - the Family and Medical Leave Act or F.M.L.A. - was passed nearly three decades ago and it is unpaid. Most people in Ohio cannot afford to take unpaid leave to be there for the birth of a new child or to care for a child who is dealing with a longer term health issue like cancer or a seizure disorder that lands a child in the hospital for several days at time. And with unpaid leave under F.M.L.A. inaccessible to 62 percent of working people in Ohio - which is higher than the national average - we are facing a caregiving crisis. This means that new parents are facing the impossible choice between financial ruin and the loss of

their job or the ability to spend those first critical weeks after the birth of their child at home healing and caring for their newborn. It is past time to modernize our policies that support working people throughout Ohio.

We want our children to start out with the best opportunities for success, however today 1 in 4 working moms are back to work within 10 days of giving birth and most dads don't even have a single day of paid family leave. Add that to the cost of child care and limited access to quality child care that exists in some areas of our state, and we have a real problem on our hands that needs to be addressed.

Across Ohio, we are seeing businesses like Ohio Health, Smuckers, and the Cleveland Clinic and local governments from Middletown to Summit County stepping up to the plate with family-centered policies at their workplaces and in the localities, but too many working people are still left out. We need you, our leaders in the Ohio General Assembly, to prioritize paid family and medical leave. We know paid family and medical leave works - eight states and D.C. already have public insurance programs for paid leave and businesses agree that paid family leave is simply good for business.

Not only is paid family and medical leave game-changing for businesses and our economy, but it is life-changing for families. Paid family and medical leave supports infant and parental bonding, reduces the rate of postpartum depression, and reduces the rate of infant mortality. Studies also show that when fathers take paid leave, it increases their involvement for the rest of the child's life. In fact, a [new study](#) was released earlier this year from Ball State University shows that parental leave helps relationships survive. Couples were 25 percent less likely to end their relationship in the first six years following the birth of a child when fathers took leave as compared to couples where the father did not take leave. One [study](#) found that mothers returning to work full time before 12 weeks was associated with an increase in problem behaviors and poorer language development in children by age 3 or 4.

To support children and families in Ohio, we need a policy that actually addresses the realities of working families' needs. Paid family and medical leave is one concrete and proven way to help families and makes good business sense. The U.S. stands alone as the only industrialized nation in the world that doesn't have a national paid leave policy and with Ohio lagging behind the national average of access to even unpaid leave under F.M.L.A., it is urgent and critical that we take action on paid family and medical leave.

I urge you to hold another hearing on this bill. There are countless people across Ohio who have experiences to share and their stories deserve to be told so you can see the full picture of the impact you could have on the lives of millions of Ohioans. Please hold another hearing on this bill and provide ample notice so that others may travel to this State House to testify on their support for paid family and medical leave. Ohio cannot afford to ignore this issue and we need your help to set Ohio's families and our next generation up for the healthiest and most productive lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testify in support of House Bill 91. I am available to answer any questions by tnajera@childrensdefense.org or at 614.221.2244.