



ARMOND BUDISH
Cuyahoga County Executive

December 5, 2016

Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee
The Honorable Ryan Smith, Chair
The Honorable Scott Ryan, Vice Chair
77 S. High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 332

Dear Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Driehaus and Members of the House Finance Committee:

I would like to join our community partners in offering Cuyahoga County's support for Senate Bill 332 as an important step forward in attacking Ohio's shamefully high rate of infant mortality. Cuyahoga County is fortunate to have several effective, evidence-based and innovative programs and services available to ensure that babies are born healthy and infant deaths are reduced. Our challenge is getting those programs that we know work delivered to the full at-risk population, not just the small portion that our available funding currently allows us to reach. Concurrently, we must assure that our efforts also focus on reducing the longstanding and unacceptable racial disparity in infant mortality, where in our community, African American babies die at three times the rate of white babies. Our local efforts are focused on three components: outreach, treatment, and prevention, and we are encouraged that Senate Bill 332 supports and enhances this important work.

In Cuyahoga County, successful outreach strategies include home visiting services such as MomsFirst, which provides culturally appropriate health education, peer-support, and transportation assistance; Nurse-Family Partnership, which provides first-time moms with valuable knowledge and support from before birth until the child reaches two years of age; and Bright Beginnings, which serves children through age 5 and provides developmental screenings, parenting support, healthcare information, and early learning activities. Additionally, the County supports effective treatment strategies such as local Fatherhood Initiatives, which target new fathers and teach them how to care for children, and Centering Pregnancy, an evidence-based care model that enables midwives to provide women with pregnancy and birth-related information in a supportive, group setting, and other creative strategies to reach at-risk families. A comprehensive approach, that supports families before, during and after pregnancy is essential in order to move the needle on these alarming statistics. It is also important to note that this problem did not appear overnight and we must remain vigilant, over time, to assure that adequate resources continue to be committed to improve Ohio's standing.

We support Senate Bill 332's emphasis on ensuring that all home visiting services in Ohio are high quality. However, every community is unique, and we cannot emphasize enough the need to foster and fund innovative approaches to engage the most difficult-to-reach populations.

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Hospitals, public agencies, businesses, philanthropy, non-profits and academic centers all must do their part for our efforts to be successful. We share a common responsibility to the next generation.

Finally, here in Cuyahoga County, we know that many of the underlying risk factors for infant mortality originate long before pregnancy, and we are encouraged by Senate Bill 332's provisions to better collect and report data related to maternal behaviors and experiences before, during and after pregnancy and early infancy, to bolster maternal health, and to facilitate strategies to reduce premature birth. The data is necessary to drive interventions and hold ourselves accountable in improving birth outcomes for all babies.

We in Cuyahoga County are trying to do our part. Despite a very tough budget, we added \$1.5 million to fight infant mortality. But, as Senate Bill 332 recognizes, no one entity can combat this problem alone. This is why Cuyahoga County has partnered with the City of Cleveland to collaborate with the healthcare community, the philanthropic community, and private sector to coordinate efforts through our First Year Cleveland initiative, which recently received \$2.9 million from the Ohio Department of Medicaid.

At my inaugural address as Cuyahoga County Executive in January of 2015, I offered the following call to action: This is our county. We are diverse. We are rich and, yes, we are poor. We have magnificent pockets of natural beauty, and unconscionable pockets of poverty. Yet our fortunes are linked, whether we know our neighbors or not. Our lives are connected. We need each other to succeed. We need to use both our head and our hearts to show ourselves and our children what can be done when we dream big, together.

On behalf of Cuyahoga County, I appreciate the leadership of Senator Jones, Senator Tavares, Governor Kasich, and all our community partners on tackling this very important public issue, and we encourage the Committee to favorably report on Senate Bill 332.

Sincerely,

Armond Budish
County Executive, Cuyahoga County

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