



November 15, 2016

Chair Sprague and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for giving your valuable attention to the topics of preterm birth and infant mortality today. My name is Ryan Adcock and I am the Executive Director of Cradle Cincinnati, a collaborative aimed at reducing infant mortality in Hamilton County. On behalf of our diverse partners, I strongly urge you to pass Senate Bill 332.

With a 13% drop in infant deaths since we launched 3 years ago, we have been encouraged by the power of partnership in Cincinnati. However, there is a great deal of work still to do. The policy changes recommended in Senate Bill 332 will help address infant mortality across Ohio.

I know that, as a policy maker, you must balance your attention on a wide variety of issues that impact Ohioans. I'd argue that infant mortality is among the most deserving of your energy.

- **The lives we lose are irreplaceable.** In Hamilton County alone, 508 of our babies died before their first birthday from 2011-2015. That's 508 kids who won't ever see a birthday, won't ever start school, won't grow up to live in our neighborhoods, work for our businesses or add to the fabric of our community. Every one of these lives is important.
- **The impact can go on for decades.** Preterm birth is the leading cause of local infant death. When a child is born preterm, their performance in school and even their future ability to work may be affected due to developmental delays. If we want to raise graduation rates and lower the rates of poverty and unemployment, we must start by making sure our infants are born on time.
- **We must improve equity nationally and locally.** African American babies are 2.5 times more likely to be born preterm and to die before their first birthday than white babies. Disparity remains even when controlling for parents' socioeconomic status. If we want to live in an equitable community, we have to ensure that all Ohioans get an equal start to life.
- **Infant mortality doesn't just speak to the health of babies; it speaks to the health of our community.** Our high statewide infant mortality rate is a "canary in the coalmine" telling us about the education, income and health of our whole community.
- **This problem is expensive and the cost affects us all.** In Hamilton County alone the total annual cost of preterm birth is \$402 million dollars. Extending pregnancy by just one week for each preterm birth in our community would reduce medical costs by over \$25 million annually.

The legislation before you is the result of the thoughtful, deliberative and highly collaborative work of the Ohio Commission on Infant Mortality. The work of that commission has been identified as national best practice and is highly aligned with the local work taking place in Cincinnati. Cradle Cincinnati and its partners are particularly encouraged to see the emphasis on Safe Sleep promotion, efforts to address pregnancy spacing, enhanced data capacity and the promotion of evidence based approaches to

community health worker programming. I believe this legislation, if passed, will save the lives of babies in Ohio. I encourage you to pass Senate Bill 332 and to advance this bill to the Governor as soon as possible.

My hope is that this is the start of a larger conversation about improving Ohio's infant mortality rate through policy change. Moving forward, I would particularly encourage this committee to pursue statewide policies that will help reduce maternal smoking in our state, a major driver of our high rate of preterm birth.

I want to thank Senators Jones and Tavares for their steadfast leadership on this topic and for sponsoring this bill. Thank you all for considering infant mortality as part of your legislative agenda this fall. We stand ready to be helpful wherever we can.