

November 16, 2016

Chair Sprague and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services—thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

I am the proud mother of a little boy, who unfortunately did not live to see his first birthday. Instead he passed away at 10 days of age due to an extremely rare genetic defect that my husband and I were unaware of until after he died.

Over the last 14 months of living our lives as bereaved parents, we have done many things to help other families who have lost children including starting an organization to help bring a sense of community to these parents as well as connecting them with other resources in the community that will help them along their journey.

It has been through our personal walk and interacting with these families that we have come to learn that infant mortality has no affiliation with socioeconomic status, race or any other factor. I graduated number one in my class of Public Relations students and went on to earn an MBA. I currently work as a Senior Media Relations Associate at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. My husband has a bachelor's degree in Marketing and an Associate's degree in Business. He attended every doctor's appointment with me throughout my pregnancy with the exception of one, which was only due to a work conflict. We don't drink, we don't smoke and we don't engage in any recreational drugs. Yet and still, we know what child loss looks like. Our story is not unique because the families who we interact with are much like us...they have good jobs, came from and live in good homes and are educated.

I speak not only on behalf of myself—but I speak for many families when I share my heart's desire in saying that something must be done to reduce infant mortality in the state of Ohio. I understand that in some circumstances like ours, where there is a genetic defect or another health issue present, that sometimes the outcome of the story may still end with a child dying. But in other cases where preventative measures can be taken and education can be given, the statistics for infant mortality can and will be changed.

I know what it is like to lose a child. And I would not wish it on my worst enemy. It is painful and it is devastating but with the help of community partners and legislators like yourselves who can put impactful and positive measures into place we can all work together to help improve what infant mortality looks like. By educating families and working with them to improve their lives pre, during and post pregnancy with tangible efforts, we can and will make a difference.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 332 and to work across the board to ensure that this bill is one that the governor signs off on. And if it ever crosses your mind not to, I want you to put yourself in the shoes of a parent who has lost a child whose story could've turned out differently had some of the components of SB 332 had been in place when they were pregnant and after they delivered.

I want to sincerely thank Senators Jones and Tavares for their efforts and their leadership on this critical topic that has far reaching impacts on our state and for their sponsorship of this bill. Their work encourages me and it lets me know that Republicans and Democrats actually can work peacefully together to accomplish great things. Their work also makes parents like me, who have to reflect on the memory of their child, instead of actually holding their child know that there are legislators who care and who want to see issues such as infant mortality change in our communities, cities and states.

Thank you all for listening to my story today.