

Testimony in Support of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health

Jan L. Ruma, Vice President, Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio & Director, Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB

Chairman Burke and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health. I'm Jan Ruma, Vice President of the Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio where I am responsible for community health improvement initiatives. As the Director of the Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB, I have worked closely with the Commission to reduce health disparities. Over the years, The Hospital Council has been the recipient of grants from the Commission to develop and refine the implementation of the Pathways Community HUB Model.

The essence of utilizing the outcome oriented Pathways Community HUB Model to address infant mortality is to find women at risk for poor birth outcomes due to their health and low socio-economic status and remove barriers to care through community health workers that provide support and help pregnant women secure food, clothing, shelter, and transportation, so they can focus on receiving needed prenatal care. With support from the Commission, we have achieved an African American low birth weight rate of 9.5%, compared to an African American low birth weight rate greater than 13% for the county and the state. In addition we are seeing other positive outcomes such as 76% of women enrolled in the Initiative are attend their post-partum visit compared to less than 50% of women overall according to a recent study by John Hopkins. The Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB has implemented the Model with fidelity and is one of only three nationally certified HUBs in the country. We believe our success is based on the Model and Ohio should encourage a HUB in each region that is working toward national certification.

Ohio's investment in the Ohio Commission on Minority Health is saving lives by furthering innovation to address one of the greatest health issues impacting our state--health disparities. Let's take this innovation statewide. If Ohio's African American Low Birth Weight was equal to our HUB's, it would save \$32 million annually in Medicaid costs alone. The Ohio Commission on Minority Health estimates that an investment of \$4.2 million over the biennium will fund grants to expand existing HUBs and start up new HUBs. That translates into an excellent return on investment and will save lives.

It is also critical to maintain Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level for all Ohio residents. Dropping Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women between 139%-200% of the Federal Poverty Level will not help Ohio combat infant mortality. If low-income pregnant women remain uninsured, they may not get the prenatal care they need to promote a safe, full-term delivery and healthy child. Research has shown that prenatal care is effective in reducing low-weight and premature births. Moreover, it saves money. The cost of hospitalizing a premature baby in a neonatal intensive care unit is around \$5,000 per day; 100 days in a NICU can cost upwards of a half million dollars. Ohio is likely to bear these costs given the current levels of children's eligibility. Not a wise move for a state with one of the worst infant mortality rates in the country. For the sake of the babies, please pay now, not later.

On that note, maintaining Medicaid eligibility up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level means that more women during their reproductive years will have access to preventive care so they can be healthy when they become pregnant which will improve the chances that they will have healthy full-term babies.

In closing, if you only took two steps to address health disparities in Ohio, please:

- Maintain Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level for all Ohio residents.
and
- Empower the Ohio Commission on Minority Health to expand its grant program to replicate and support the Certified Pathways Community HUB Model across Ohio. If Ohio's African American Low Birth Weight was equal to our HUB's, it would save \$32 million annually in Medicaid costs alone. The model is also being used to effectively address other high cost health disparities.

The Ohio Commission on Minority Health and Medicaid eligibility are critical investments necessary to reduce health disparities and to further Ohio's fight to save our babies.

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