



# Pregnancy Decision Health Centers

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Good morning Chairman Oeslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you regarding House Bill 166. As the President of Pregnancy Decision Health Centers (PDHC) in Columbus, Ohio, I represent the work that we do in our four centers located in both Franklin and Fairfield counties, and I am here as an advocate for the work of pregnancy centers from around the state.

PDHC has promoted healthy pregnancy and childbirth since 1981. We provide early pregnancy intervention services, education, and resources for those who are most at-risk for adverse medical and social outcomes. We provide pregnancy testing and verification, ultrasound, prenatal vitamins, and connection to various pregnancy and family care services. In the past 10 years, over 14,000 women had positive pregnancy tests at our centers. PDHC provides individualized care to address each woman's risks and comprehensive, group parenting classes specifically designed to reduce the risks of infant mortality and promote healthy outcomes.

As no-cost service providers, pregnancy centers are in a strategic position to reach women in poverty who are at the greatest risk for infant mortality. Each one of our staff nurses has the likelihood to be the first medical point of contact that a woman has during her pregnancy. In 2018, 66% of the women served at PDHC reported an annual income of less than \$15,000 and an additional 22% reported an income of less than \$30,000. As a recipient of OPP funds in 2018 and 2019, PDHC increased service to those in need by 12% and served more than 1,500 TANF eligible pregnant women in Franklin County, the county with the highest number of infant deaths in our state.

According to the 2017 Ohio Infant Mortality Report, prematurity is the leading cause of infant death. Evidence shows that poorly nourished moms have a higher risk of stillborn and low-birth weight babies. PDHC combats this risk by empowering women with access to early prenatal care and prenatal vitamins. Vitamin nutrients support healthy moms and babies during and after pregnancy. All PDHC clients are

eligible to receive prenatal vitamins at no cost. During our current OPP grant funding cycle, PDHC has provided 329,000 prenatal vitamin doses to expectant mothers. Prenatal vitamins include necessary nutrients: Folate, Vitamin A, Iron, and Iodine. Folate supports brain and spine development. Vitamin A fights against infection and boosts iron metabolism and hemoglobin production. Iron prevents anemia in pregnancy and increases blood supply to the placenta carrying oxygen and nutrients to developing babies. Iodine reduces the risk of miscarriage and stillbirth.

In addition, PDHC educates pregnant women and new families on a wide range of topics including: safe sleep, car seat safety, the risks of smoking and substance use, benefits of breastfeeding and other essential topics. All of which are designed to reduce the infant mortality rate in our county by using a collaborative approach with county agencies and evidenced-based education. Thanks to OPP funding previously allocated in state's budget PDHC increased parenting education to Franklin County families by 34% in 2018.

As a service provider committed to providing care at no cost and without qualification, we have the ability to reach those who are most vulnerable among us. Our greatest challenge is limited resources. Our ability to serve depends on the generosity of our donors. We are very grateful that people of goodwill have enabled us to reach thousands of women and families through the years, but we know that our state's challenge of infant mortality surpasses our resources. We estimate that PDHC could reach 20% more women and families with funds appropriated to us in the 2020-2021 state budget through the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program.

Chairman Oeslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share how pregnancy centers are uniquely suited to support healthy pregnancy and combat the problem of infant mortality. I appreciate your public service and commitment to reduce the incidence of infant mortality in our state. I urge you to support successful pregnancy outcomes by increasing the amount of funding to five million for the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program available to pregnancy centers.