



May 23, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today on Substitute House Bill 166. My name is Leeann Beach and I am the Executive Director of Heartbeat of Toledo, one of the 142 pregnancy resource centers located in Ohio. Heartbeat has two locations in Northwest Ohio as well as a Mobile Women's Center. Heartbeat of Toledo has been in existence since 1971 and was the birthplace of Heartbeat International. Today Heartbeat International has assisted and encouraged over 2,500 pregnancy help centers on every inhabited continent.

Heartbeat has two locations in Toledo—one near the University of Toledo and the other in East Toledo. East Toledo has more single mother households than 98.7 percent of the United States and the per capita income of residents is lower than 98.1 percent of the neighborhoods in America.

In 2018, Heartbeat helped **1,566** women and their families. All of our services are free and confidential which include: pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, options counseling, prenatal vitamins, emergency assistance, and parenting classes that offer the opportunity for moms and dads to earn free baby items.

Heartbeat provided **811** pregnancy tests, **1,029** ultrasounds, and **3,885** parenting classes. Overall, Heartbeat offered **5,166** opportunities to provide **education** and **empowerment** to women and families in our community.

Heartbeat was awarded and is currently benefiting from the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program (OPP) funding. This funding has enabled us to meet the needs of those we serve in essential ways! This funding allowed us to assist **555 TANF-eligible clients** in 2018 alone! 555 women and families received the vital services they needed to continue a healthy pregnancy, get connected to excellent community resources, attend parenting classes that helps them to earn tangible baby items to care for their child(ren).

Over the last year we have added two facets to Heartbeat in an effort to deepen the impact of our services in the lives of the women and families we serve through the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy (OPP) funding. One of those facets is the **10-week Nurturing Parent group curriculum**. While there is significance in meeting one-on-one with a parenting instructor through our Heart to Heart Parenting Program, there is something equally significant that happens when women and families can bond together over their similarities and learn together. The Nurturing Parent Curriculum focuses on discipline and reducing the incidence of abuse and neglect in the home.

The second facet added through the OPP funding is our **Sharing Hearts Birth Parent Support Group**. We had been experiencing an increase in women making an adoption decision. Each time there is a woman interested in learning more about adoption we are now able to bring in a Social Worker that is a trained Adoption Assessor as an expert on adoption. This same woman leads a small group once a month for those who have made an adoption decision. There is great importance found in the ongoing support for the birth parents in working through their grief. Through the adoption process if the birth mother is on the adoptive parents' insurance this carries them through 6 weeks after the baby is born and intentional care/support from the agency often falls off at that point, as well. Often times this is the only time for counseling is within that 6 week timeframe. Think about any of the things you have grieved in your life, there is no

way that you could process all of that grief and loss in 6 weeks time. This is why Sharing Hearts exists, to fill this gap for the women we serve. As a result of this group we have seen women share their stories in significant ways and in all different chapters of their story. We have the opportunity to provide support and healing for not only the women that chose adoption through their time with us, but also women within our community that have never found that safe place to share their story. This is the first group of it's kind within a 200 miles radius!

The Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program funding is set to end in July of this year. It is my hope that continued Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy funding will be made available in the Ohio budget so that Heartbeat and other pregnancy centers can continue to serve the thousands of women in need of their services. Our hope would be to not only continue the wonderful facets we have added through OPP and add new facets that will help us to further deepen the services we offer our great community.

Jaquiline* is an example of a recent client who is benefiting from Heartbeat services.

She came to Heartbeat in early 2018 after moving back home and unsure of what to do. She was met with compassion and peace as she was provided education on her pregnancy and the resources available to her in our community. She had her first child away from home and in an extremely difficult environment. The trauma she experienced almost cost her the joy that her daughter now brings to her life.

Jacquiline found such strength and empowerment through the support she was met with at Heartbeat. She was connected to a physician and began taking classes through our parenting education program. She also joined the 10-week Nurturing Parent group class. Jacquiline recently shared how Heartbeat has literally changed her life by meeting her right where she was when she first

came to us and providing her support and education, meeting the tangible needs of her baby girl while continuing to help Jacqueline learn and grow as a Mom.

There is such beauty to be found in the work Heartbeat has invested to our community over the last 48 years. With continuation, and possibly increase, of the funding provided through Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy grant we will continue to meet the increasing needs of our community, encouraging not only this generation but the generation to come.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share what Heartbeat has been able to do to help low-income pregnant women and their families and thank you for helping to provide this assistance through the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program.

Leeann Beach
Executive Director
Heartbeat of Toledo