



Testimony of

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Before the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee

Supporting SB 151

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Good afternoon Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, and Ranking Member Antonio, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony in support of SB 151, introduced by Senator Tina Maharath.

Senator Maharath's bill would designate the month of May as maternal mortality awareness month. This designation will bring critical recognition and awareness to the issue of maternal health and mortality.

Over the past seven years I have had the privilege of working with at risk pregnant women through the Moms2B program. Moms2B, which is housed within the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Ohio State University College of Medicine, is a program to help women at high risk for infant mortality learn tools that will enable them to make healthier choices and deliver healthy, full-term infants. The program operates in eight neighborhoods in Franklin County.

I have seen the women who attend Moms2B sessions go through pregnancy – some so excited to meet their little one, others more nervous about how they will care for baby when they have so many other responsibilities. Pregnancy and giving birth is a strange time; society paints this picture of excitement and hope and that picture is true – we are welcoming a little baby that we will love more than we thought possible. But there is also an element of trepidation. In Moms2B sessions we talk about labor and delivery and how to manage the pain, or how to know when to go to the hospital. But I think there is another feeling of fear that lingers that we do not always talk about – the fact that in some way we are risking our life to bring another into this world. I have a one year old daughter – which is strange to say – she just turned one yesterday. As the weather has turned and her birthday neared I became very nostalgic about her birth – I was lucky to have an uncomplicated birth for myself and for her. But I also remember that as I neared my due date last year, I had this nagging fear, hoping that everything would be alright. My father's mother died in child birth with him. She is seldom talked about and I know how her absence in his life affected him. And I could not help but think, I am her granddaughter, if it happened to her, it could happen to me.

Unfortunately, this fear was not necessarily unchecked when the United States has an unacceptable maternal mortality rate of 20 per 100,000 which is continuing to increase. The women that I have worked with for the past seven years are primarily black and I fear for them even more. Their risk of dying due to pregnancy or birth is twice that of mine. The women that I work with come from disadvantaged areas and while this puts them at more of a deficit it also makes them strong. They care

for a baby without the resources that we here in this room take for granted. Whether it is not having enough money to buy three types of pacifiers to find the one that baby will actually take, not having transportation to get to the grocery store with a newborn, or simply being single and having no one to hold the crying baby. These women are trying and they are stretched too thin. Often times the needs of their children will take precedence over their own. One of our moms had several young children and unfortunately had a miscarriage. She did not pass that miscarriage and needed a D and C, she put the procedure off for weeks, risking her own health because she had no one to care for her young children during the day when the clinic was open. Another one of our moms struggled with high blood pressure during pregnancy and continued to after birth. She worked to get health insurance for months and was not successful. One day she came to our Moms2B session after having her baby boy not feeling well, a nurse took her blood pressure and it was through the roof. She was rushed to the hospital. Her health continued to be at risk after discharge because she was not able to routinely access blood pressure medication.

The causes of maternal mortality are many and are not always avoided by having resources or education. This is why I support Senate Bill 151 – by bringing awareness to the issue hopefully we can make changes at all levels – from taking the concerns of women in the labor and delivery and post-partum room seriously to providing supports to women after delivery like nurse home visits or access to resources to take care of themselves and their babies during such a vulnerable time.

Thank you for bringing awareness to this important issue.