

Senator Dave Burke, Chairman  
Committee on Health, Human Services, and Medicaid  
Ohio Senate

October 15, 2019

Chairman Burke,

We are pleased to support House Bill 11 to improve health outcomes tied to infant mortality rates in Ohio. We are grateful to co-sponsors Representatives Manning and Howse for introducing this important bill and to the Ohio House for passing it unanimously. We urge the Senate Health, Human Services & Medicaid Committee to support these efforts by beginning hearings and passing the bill this year.

We fully support the comprehensive approach in HB 11 to address four elements of pre-natal health: smoking cessation, dental hygiene, lead education and group prenatal care. We would like to specifically highlight the positive impact of group pre-natal care.

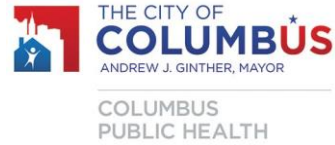
Group prenatal care is a model that takes place in a group setting, allowing patients to spend more time with their health care providers. In group prenatal care, 8-12 pregnant women due within the same month attend their prenatal care sessions together. At the beginning of each session, women take part in their own care by measuring and recording their own blood pressure, temperature and weight. Then each woman meets with her health care provider for her individual health assessment. Once health assessments are complete, everyone comes together for 90-120 minutes of group discussion on important health topics, including stress management, labor and nutrition. This open discussion promotes information-sharing and increases overall social support among the women in the group.

The group prenatal care model has been shown to significantly improve maternal and child health outcomes, particularly for African American women being served across Ohio. Expanding group prenatal care throughout Ohio can significantly save lives and health care dollars with less days in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) for newborns.

In Columbus, CelebrateOne is the collective community impact initiative created to address Columbus and Franklin County's unacceptably high infant mortality rate. Working together, our community reduced the infant mortality rate to 7.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 -- a 23% reduction since 2011. The 2018 data showed incremental progress in the percentage of pregnant women accessing prenatal care. CelebrateOne's pregnancy support programs include referrals to all group prenatal sites in Franklin County.

Expanding group prenatal care will improve maternal and child health outcomes and create a more cost effective, sustainable health care business model that will give us the unique opportunity for the first time in Ohio to align prenatal care systems and home visiting programs into one seamless system of care with all expectant parents enrolled in group prenatal care.

Additionally, requiring Medicaid to cover dental cleanings is a positive step toward de-compartmentalizing the health of the mouth from the health of the entire body. Poor oral health can cause considerable pain and suffering, and change what people eat, their speech and their quality of life and well-being. Poor oral health also can



contribute to the development of chronic diseases. Caring for the oral health of pregnant women is one more building block of improving health outcomes.

Furthermore, we can protect health by including lead education materials for pregnant women in the Help Me Grow home visiting program who live in dwellings built before 1979 because of the deleterious effects of lead poisoning. Small amounts of lead can cause learning and behavioral problems in children as the heavy metal preplaces iron and calcium in the body. Young children are especially susceptible to lead poisoning because a growing body easily absorbs the metal. We support the inclusion of educational materials and encourage a strengthening of Ohio's laws and programming around lead remediation.

Lastly, we are most appreciative of the provision that would require Medicaid to cover all FDA-approved tobacco cessation medications and therapies which will undoubtedly improve infant mortality outcomes. In no uncertain terms, smoking, whether pregnant or not, is one of the most harmful health behaviors in which a person can engage. Smoking while pregnant increases the likelihood of miscarriage, premature delivery, stillbirth and low birth weight. Minimizing the prevalence of smoking in society is a laudable and paramount goal of policymakers and public health officials to protect the health of mothers, their babies and the community at large.

We look forward to supporting efforts to move the bill expeditiously through the committee process and a vote on the Senate floor so that the increased support for infant mortality efforts can take effect and CelebrateOne and its partners can continue and grow its group prenatal care program.

Respectfully,

Andrew J. Ginther  
Mayor  
City of Columbus

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Executive Director  
CelebrateOne

Mysheika W. Roberts, MD, MPH  
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Columbus Public Health

- cc: Senator Nicki Antonio, Ranking Member  
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Senator Stephanie Kunze  
Senator Peggy Lehner  
Senator Tina Maharath  
Senator Kristina Roegner  
Senator Kirk Schuring  
Senator Cecil Thomas