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SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND MEDICAID COMMITTEE
CHAIRMAN BURKE
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Tara Britton, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy

Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on Senate Bill 326. My name is Tara Britton and I am the Director of Public Policy at The Center for Community Solutions, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that aims to improve health, social and economic conditions through research, policy analysis, communications and advocacy.

In the United States, women are dying from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth at a higher rate than other industrialized nations, and the rate is increasing. Approximately 700 women die each year in the U.S., and thousands more experience complications, often viewed as “near misses” of a maternal death. Non-Hispanic Black women are dying at a rate 3 to 4 times that of non-Hispanic white women. According to a 2019 report from the Ohio Department of Health, there were 186 pregnancy-associated deaths between 2008 and 2016. This data shows significant racial disparities. Black women died at a rate more than two and a half times that of white women.¹ Community Solutions has worked to improve awareness and knowledge of maternal mortality in Ohio over the last several years.

Last year’s state budget made important improvements to Ohio’s Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review Committee (PAMR), situated at the Ohio Department of Health. The PAMR reviews all maternal deaths in Ohio and the budget formally put this committee into state statute. We know that collecting and reviewing this data can be challenging due to delays in receiving it and PAMR not always receiving complete information. It is important for complete data on pregnancy-associated deaths to be submitted to PAMR, but that doesn’t always occur, and if it does, there is often a time lag. Codifying this committee and offering legal protections to those entities who report the data were important first steps. Additional changes will further strengthen the committee and give it the tools it needs to compel the submission of data on maternal deaths in a timely manner.

Current law requires reporting of this data every two years. We already know that there is a significant lag in the reporting of this information and think it is imperative that we are informed

¹ A Report on Pregnancy-Associated Deaths in Ohio 2008-2016, Ohio Department of Health 2019

annually about maternal death reviews in Ohio in order to learn from deaths that have occurred and prevent future deaths. We support this change in SB 326.

While we understand it is a big undertaking, it is vital to have an accurate view of severe maternal morbidity (SMM). SB 326 requires a report on SMM. There are examples from other states that have worked to incorporate severe maternal morbidity into their state PAMRs.

Over the last several years, Ohio has committed to broad-based efforts and has dedicated resources to addressing the state's high rate of infant mortality, which is still too high. While many strategies employed to reduce this rate could also make an impact on maternal health, a dedicated effort to address maternal mortality and morbidity is also required to wholly address maternal and infant health. Improvements have been made in the United States and around the world, so there are certainly lessons to learn. Having timely and complete data on this issue is an important step toward implementing measures to improve maternal health and wellbeing. Community Solutions is committed to working alongside the General Assembly and the administration to carry this issue forward and to work to support implementation of on-the-ground changes to prevent maternal deaths.

I want to thank you again for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony as Community Solutions always values the chance to weigh in on policy that would greatly impact the health and wellbeing of Ohioans. We would welcome the chance to share additional research that we have conducted in this space and are happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

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