

Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Thomas. Good Morning. My name is Christin Farmer, and I am the Founding President & CEO of Birthing Beautiful Communities or BBC for the duration of this testimony. BBC was founded in 2015 as a perinatal support and workforce development agency, providing services in Cuyahoga and Summit counties for new and expectant women, working to prevent and reduce the black infant mortality rates that drive Ohio as one of the worst states for infant deaths in the country. The perinatal period is defined as during pregnancy through postpartum. BBC provides comprehensive support from early pregnancy, attendance at the labor and delivery, and for up to one year after the baby is born, a total average of 80 weeks. The 24 staff members are trained perinatal support specialists, with a core foundation of doula values. Doula – D-O-U-L-A- which means “a woman who serves”, historically and presently provides continuous emotional support for a pregnant, birthing or postpartum mother, during her greatest time of need and vulnerability. BBC’s perinatal support specialists offer the role of the doula but also of that a friend, a sister and a support system. Designed to address the unmet needs of many mothers, we simply fill the systems gaps. That means attending prenatal visits, providing transportation, facilitating classes on parenting and childbirth education, encouraging father participation, addressing maternal mental health, education, workforce, legal issues and more. Our principles are rooted in the health and overall well-being of the mother, who is the ultimate life force, and therefore must be protected in order to preserve our future. It is important that an expectant mother is treated with dignity and respect. Shackling mothers can cause psychological stress to the mother, thus possibly sending the baby into distress. The more tense the mother is, the more her level of risk for a complicated birth increase. The pregnant body responds to external, environmental factors and if the mother is stressed, frightened or uncomfortable, the tighter her muscles become, and her blood pressure can rise. At the same time, the baby is reacting to the mother’s response, and can cause the mother to go into labor prematurely. Anxiety, depression, panic and fear can cause an increase of cortisol, the stress hormone, and more research, as done by Dr. Angela Neal Barnett, is now available on its effect in prematurity, the leading cause of infant death. For those babies that do survive, the ongoing care of those children into adulthood are very costly. In a 2019 Economic Impact of Preterm Birth Analysis done by Cradle Cincinnati,

revealed that it costs Hamilton County \$111 million annually for medical and educational costs related to preterm birth. For the State of Ohio, that cost can easily exceed \$1.6 billion a year, given Ohio's total population. Strained conditions can also have the effect of a longer labor, due to muscle tension, triggering a cascade of interventions, including induction, epidural and/or a cesarean section. Continuous perinatal support, proper hospital treatment and low stress environments are essential to preventing unnecessary adverse birth experiences and outcomes. Women have the right to become mothers and should have the ability to comfortably birth freely. As a community, we have the responsibility of causing the least harm to mothers, who already live in confinement. Let's not chain their wrists too. Please support the anti-shackling bill of our Ohio mothers.