



Ohio Senate
 Finance Committee
 House Bill 110
 May 13, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, we write this collective letter as Help Me Grow evidence-based home visiting providers from across the state of Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony expressing our support for increasing the state investment in Help Me Grow, Ohio’s evidence-based home visiting program, and extending Medicaid eligibility to 12-months postpartum in House Bill 110, the FY2022-2023 state budget. Specifically, we are providing testimony today to urge your support for investing an additional \$1.9M in FY23 for Ohio’s Help Me Grow program and to extend postpartum coverage for Medicaid-eligible women from 60-days to 12-months postpartum.

The experiences of mothers and infants are intricately linked. Whether infants are born healthy and with the potential to thrive as they grow greatly depends on their mother’s well-being. In the context of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic and Ohio’s ongoing infant and maternal mortality crisis, Ohio must invest in programs that support pregnant women before, during, *and* after birth. Now is the time for us to double down on our commitment to Ohio’s youngest and most vulnerable children, as well as the families who support them.

Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting brings early childhood development and health professionals to new parents to help them cultivate strong, healthy relationships with their children, give children the emotional security required for healthy development, and provide parents with the knowledge to understand their child’s needs, as well as their own. Families enrolled in Help Me Grow home visiting services receive maternal health and wellness screenings, child health and development screenings, parenting education, and referral to medical and social supports. Home visitors also facilitate transitions to appropriate programs and services that support child development.

As it stands now, the Ohio Department of Health has increased the Help Me Grow investment over the biennium by a total of \$1.9 million. The increase in funding will allow for 500 additional families to receive home visiting services in the upcoming biennium. **We are asking for an additional \$1.9 million investment in FY23 through amendment SC2364, which will allow the program to serve 1,000 additional children during the upcoming biennium.**

Further, we know that healthy moms are the foundation of healthy babies. When a mother dies as a result of childbirth, it is a tragedy for both families and communities. Our nation and our state are facing

an infant and maternal mortality crisis. A key opportunity to address these crises is to extend the postpartum coverage period in Medicaid from the current 60 days to a full year, which is in line with clinical evidence. Our state's rate of maternal mortality is rising, and a growing body of evidence shows that many of these deaths, particularly from preventable causes, occur during the period after pregnancy-related Medicaid coverage ends.

The federal American Rescue Plan Act affords states the authority and the federal match needed to provide 12-months of continuous postpartum coverage to Medicaid-eligible women. **We are seeking amendment SC2527 to HB 110 to leverage this benefit, extending postpartum coverage to 12 months for women up to 200% of the FPL. We estimate that this extension would apply to nearly 6,000 women in Ohio.** Extending postpartum coverage to 12 months will ensure continuity of health care, support behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment, and keep moms healthy and engaged in parenting. This policy also affords women the flexibility to focus on family, maintain their health so that they can make plans to return to work or school, and help save Ohio money from costly health interventions down the road.

The Ohio General Assembly has the opportunity to help improve outcomes for both moms and babies by expanding home visiting services and extending postpartum Medicaid coverage for eligible mothers. Governor DeWine and others across the state, including the Ohio Department of Medicaid and the Ohio Department of Health, have expressed a commitment to addressing the devastating impacts of the infant and maternal mortality crisis. In order to ensure that moms and babies are receiving the services they need, we must maintain the historic investment seen during the last biennium in home visiting and provide additional state investment and support for growth and the leveraging of additional federal resources. We also must ensure that all individuals whose pregnancies are covered by Medicaid can keep their Medicaid coverage for at least one year postpartum.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony regarding these two important issues and please do not hesitate to contact us directly if you have any questions.