

Senate
Senate Health Committee

Stark County Community Action Agency
2022-23 Budget Testimony

Thursday, May 6, 2021

Good morning Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and esteemed members of the Senate Health Committee. My name is Rodney Reasonover; I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Stark County Community Action Agency, in Canton, Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony for the budgetary years of 2022-23. In lieu of testifying in person, I am submitting this written testimony for consideration.

The Stark County Community Action Agency, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1981, serves as the Ohio Development Services Agency designated anti-poverty agency for Stark County, Ohio. The Stark County Community Action Agency mission is to promote the attainment of self-sufficiency among low-income individuals and families. This is accomplished through the provision of innovative strategies, financial opportunities, health initiatives, and locally determined programming designed to measurably impact upon the causes and conditions of poverty.

In 2016, through an assessment of the local landscape, in response to Ohio's Infant mortality, and specifically the minority infant mortality crisis, the Stark County Community Action Agency identified and substantiated the undeniable link between poverty and infant mortality. The Stark County Community Action Agency recognizes that infant mortality rates are one of the strongest indicators available as to the overall health and well-being of a community. The most recent data published from the Ohio Department of Health: Center for Public Health Statistics & Informatics¹, reported an average infant mortality rate of 5.4 per 1,000 live births amongst all races in Stark County in 2019.

Among Stark County residents, there is a substantial disparity in the rate of infant mortality by maternal race/ethnicity, as non-Hispanic Black mothers experience infant mortality at over two times of the rate of non-Hispanic White mothers. Disorders related to premature births and low birth weights are the leading causes of infant deaths and impact long-term

and ongoing health challenges. In fact, a variety of social needs and life experiences of low income, high risk African American women contribute significantly to poor birth outcomes. Families in need face complex and interconnected challenges that require them to seek help from multiple sources.

Navigating our social service network can be a difficult and challenging journey. One of the Stark County Community Action Agency's strategies to address the needs of its low-income residents includes the Pathways Community HUB. The HUB infrastructure provides a way to efficiently make connections to high quality services and ensure that crucial needs are being addressed. Often providers are very much aware of the multi-systemic needs of their clients, but lack the resources to effectively link clients to services beyond those offered by any one particular agency. The Certified Pathways Community HUB Model is a nationally certified, evidence-based, peer-reviewed, pay-for-performance, care coordination model that uses formal and standardized processes in the delivery of community-based care coordination services. This certified model requires the use of 20 pathways to measurably improve birth outcomes and links payment to performance. The model's success is largely connected to the use of certified community health workers who are assigned to work with the high-risk mothers who coordinate care related to prenatal clinical care, as well as a multitude of factors reflective of the social determinants of health, including education, employment, housing, behavioral health, and other needed essential services. The Pathways Community HUB model addresses the challenge of the demonstration of effective investment that directly impacts health outcomes.

In its first few years of implementation, the Stark County Community Action Agency's Pathways HUB served over 285 pregnant women and had 82 babies born to HUB clients. We continually witness seeing positive results. Among the pregnant women served, we were able to address health and social needs through multiple service pathways including housing assistance, education, and medical referrals. Among the other most frequently activated pathways were postpartum, health insurance, and family planning. As our engagement with pregnant clients increases each year of implementation, as we see the number of clients connected to critical prenatal healthcare services steadily rise. As a result of these care coordination services, we are pleased to report that among the early group of women enrolled in the Stark County Community Action Pathways HUB, 85% delivered

healthy weight babies at full-term. As we look ahead to our work in the coming years, we are targeting growth and continued progress toward improved health and social outcomes.

Currently, all of the Ohio Medicaid Managed Care plans contract with the Pathways HUB model. At this time, the Stark County Community Action Pathways HUB has achieved provisional certification from the Pathways Community HUB Institute and has continued our efforts to maintain contracts with these managed care plans, currently contracting with four out of the five plans, with a contract in process with the final plan provider. The return in investment of this model and program has been evidenced by the retrospective cohort study focusing on the Toledo HUB in which a 236% return on investment with per/member per/month savings for high, medium and low risk members.² In addition, the study indicated that high-risk pregnant women in the HUB's service area that did not participate in HUB services, had a 1.55 times greater likelihood of having an infant that needed Special Nursery Care or Neonatal ICU services.³ This model has proven it is worth the investment.

The Stark County Community Action Pathways HUB has been able to achieve this level of service and anticipate such growth due to the funding and technical assistance coordinated with the Commission on Minority Health. Increased funding of the Infant Mortality Grant Initiative within the Ohio Commission on Minority Health's budget and continued use of the Certified Pathways HUB model will help ensure the expansion of existing HUB capacity to serve more clients, and support the expansion to develop new HUBs throughout the state to ensure similar positive birth outcomes. Therefore, I would on behalf of the Stark County Community Action Board and Community Action Pathways HUB encourage and request ongoing support from this Committee as well as the Ohio General Assembly to ensure continued resources and ensure the provision of additional resources as requested in the 2022-2023 budget biennium.

Again, thank you for your past support of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health HUB Grant and Infant Mortality Grant Initiative. Thank you also for the opportunity to provide this budget testimony.

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References:

1. Ohio Department of Health (2019). Center for Public Health Statistics & Informatics.
2. Buckeye Health Plan, (2018). Lower First Year of Life Costs for Babies through Health Plan and Community Hub Partnership.
3. Buckeye Health Plan, (2018). Improved Birth Outcomes through Health Plan and Community Hub Partnership.