

**House Bill 7 - Proponent Testimony
House Families and Aging Committee
May 2, 2023**

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families and Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Bill 7, particularly the provisions that provide grant funding for medical-legal partnerships in Ohio.

I am Angela Lloyd, Executive Director of the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation, a statewide nonprofit organization committed to funding civil legal aid and access to justice initiatives to help ensure fairness and access to justice for low-income Ohioans. The Foundation's mission is to improve access to justice and ensure that legal aid societies and other resources, programs, and services address the unmet civil legal needs of low-income and underserved Ohioans. The Foundation achieves its mission through the distribution of financial resources generated by the Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) and Interest on Trust Accounts (IOTA) programs, the monies collected through a civil filing fee surcharge, federal and state funding support, and by raising additional dollars for civil legal aid and access to justice.

The Ohio Access to Justice Foundation has had the privilege of funding medical-legal partnerships in Ohio for over a decade. In fact, Ohio currently has 28 medical-legal partnerships around the state. The goal of a medical-legal partnership is to identify medical conditions that are being impacted by facts and circumstances that are best addressed through the legal system. In that way the medical-legal partnership serves a person holistically. Medical-legal partnerships can achieve everything from remediating mold in an apartment, which improves the health of all of the family members living there; reduces the health care costs to the family and to the healthcare system; and, stabilizes both employment and school success, as fewer days are missed to treat the asthma that results from mold to ensuring that babies are carried full-term and born at a healthy birthweight.

Under HB 7, the General Assembly would establish and fund a medical-legal partnership grant program under the Ohio Department of Health, which would award grants to legal service organizations and medical providers that partner together to identify pregnant women, mothers, and children in need of legal services and to provide them with those services.

The Foundation has previously funded just such a medical-legal partnership. In 2017, the Foundation supported a legal fellow at Legal Aid of Greater Cincinnati for a two-year fellowship during which she served pregnant mothers. The results of her work was statistically significant in that every client she served carried her baby to term and each baby was born at full birth weight. The Foundation continues to fund medical-legal partnerships which include legal work to support pregnant mothers and children. Last year, we featured the story of a pregnant mother who was stressed due to malfunctioning electricity in her

apartment. The landlord's original response had been to run extension cords all over the apartment, which endangered the mother's toddler. Thanks to legal aid's intervention, the electricity was repaired properly; the extension cords were removed; and the pregnant mother's health improved as she was able to focus on her pregnancy and didn't have to worry about her toddler. She, too, carried her baby to term and it was born at a healthy birth weight. This is the type of impactful work that HB 7 will create. I am supportive of the Legislature's intent to expand this important work.

In 2021, the Foundation oversaw a six-month grant from CareSource that funded the legal work associated with medical-legal partnerships. The one time-funding of \$500,000 resulted in \$751,552 in one-time money awards to clients and \$1,215,000 in annualized awards. That's a 300% return on investment; and, more importantly, that represents clients and families in better, healthier circumstances as a result of having greater resources in their homes. HB 7 and its provisions in support of medical-legal partnerships can have this type of impact.

Chair Schmidt, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 7, and I encourage members of the committee to support resources for these critical services. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or members of the committee may have.