



Ohio House Finance Committee Testimony on HB 7

The Strong Foundations Act

October 2nd, 2023

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, to testify in support of House Bill 7, The Strong Foundations Act. My name is Dustin McKee and I am the CEO of the Ohio Psychological Association (OPA).

OPA Represents Ohio's more than 3,500 licensed psychologists. As Ohio's scientists-practitioners in the behavioral health field, our members are deeply committed to ensuring that every child has a chance to grow up healthy through a strong foundation of support and care in their first 1,000 days of life. Doing so can have a dramatic impact on the course of their development, and on outcomes related to their long-term health, behavioral health, economic and social wellness.

OPA echoes the urgency with which our sponsors have spoken about the need to continue to address Ohio's infant mortality and maternal mortality rates. We would like to thank Representatives White and Humphrey for introducing this legislation. We would also like to thank Chairman Edwards and members of this committee and the General Assembly for successfully advocating for new investments to address this issue in HB 33, including two provisions from HB 7 – doula services and continuous Medicaid coverage for babies 0-3 once they qualify.

As Representative White stated in her testimony “House Bill 7 strategically addresses Ohio's infant and maternal mortality crisis, while sharply focusing on improving health and developmental outcomes for babies, mothers, and families by expanded prenatal, postnatal and infant and toddler services and supports”

There has been a significant amount of research that has established the link between the mental health mothers and their infants and children and the social determinants of health and wellness. It is also well established that a mother's mental health during the perinatal period has a significant impact on the health, mental health and long-term social and emotional outcomes of the infant and child. HB 7 proactively addresses these issues.

HB 7 invests significant resources and supports for policies and practices that research has shown to have a positive impact on improving both the social determinants of the health and mental health and the quality of mental health for mothers and children. The legislation includes investments and supports for stable housing through the Health Beginnings Program; social connection and health and psychoeducation of mothers through various investments in centering pregnancy initiatives; early intervention services through Part C and Help Me Grow to support access to evidence based home visiting services; access to nutrition care through innovation in the Women's Infants and Children (WIC) program; and access to health and behavioral health services by establishing a waiver with CMS to provide continuous enrollment for Medicaid-eligible children from birth through age three in Ohio.

HB 7 also directly addresses programming and services that will positively impact maternal, family and child mental health. OPA appreciates the sponsors inclusion of provisions to improve access to evidence-based mental health and dyadic family therapy services for young children and their caregivers as well as screening for mothers and young children. OPA also supports the investments in the development of online and other training tools to support early childhood mental health.

In conclusion, OPA would like to again thank Representatives White and Humphrey for introducing this legislation. We also thank you, members of the Ohio House Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify in this important legislation. We urge you to support this legislation to address the important issues described above. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.