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**House Bill 7 Proponent Testimony**  
**House Finance Committee**  
**Danielle DeLeon Spires, Policy Advocate**  
**Ohio Poverty Law Center**  
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Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 7 and in particular the provisions that would expand the reach of Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs). My name is Danielle DeLeon Spires and I am a Policy Advocate at the Ohio Poverty Law Center. The Ohio Poverty Law Center's mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty. We draw on the day-to-day experiences of Legal Aid attorneys serving low-income Ohioans across the state.

House Bill 7 is a comprehensive look at improving infant and maternal health outcomes. One provision establishes a grant program to expand the reach of MLPs to more pregnant women and children. MLPs link the expertise of healthcare providers and legal professionals to address legal issues that adversely affect the health of patients or increase health care utilization. In MLPs, medical and legal professionals collaborate on training, referrals, screening tools, and sharing case and outcome data. Legal Aid attorneys can assist patients in achieving better health outcomes by providing them with the necessary legal services to address issues related to housing, public benefits, custody, domestic violence, and education. By including MLPs, the bill sponsors and supporters recognize the role that legal services play in improving health outcomes.

Evaluations of MLPs in Ohio and across the country consistently show improved health outcomes.

In Ohio, Child HeLP is a partnership between Cincinnati Children's Hospital and the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati. It was established in 2008 and, since then, the hospital has referred thousands of patients for legal assistance. The legal team then addresses some of the patients' legal and law-related social needs—such as unsafe housing or delays in SNAP benefits—which can directly impact patient health. In a [study](#) published March 7, 2022 in *Health Affairs*, researchers examined thousands of cases to demonstrate how the Child HeLP

program resulted in sharp reductions in hospital admissions for children during the year following a referral to the program—showing nearly 38 percent fewer hospitalizations.

Other studies show when legal expertise and services are used to address social needs

- People with chronic illnesses are healthier and admitted to the hospital less frequently, saving health care costs
- People report less stress and experience improvements in mental health.
- People are more stably housed and their utilities are less likely to be shut off.
- People have access to greater financial resources.

It is clear the MLPs work to improve health outcomes and save money. But making these collaborative services a regular part of today's health care system requires a cultural shift. The grant program proposed in HB7 is a start in that cultural shift.

Many people do not know they have a legal issue and are unaware of how an attorney can help them. A referral from a trusted medical provider through a MLP can make that connection.

MLPs improve health outcomes, stabilize families, and save money. Directing resources to MLPs is a wise investment for the state. The grant program proposed in House Bill 7 is a great start to sustaining and expanding the reach of MLPs and the critical legal services delivered by Ohio's legal aid offices.