



Testimony of First Year Cleveland
The Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee
November 1, 2023

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and Public Health Policy Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of First Year Cleveland in support of HB190, Black Maternal Health Week.

My name is Angela Newman-White, and I am the Executive Director of First Year Cleveland. First Year Cleveland's mission is to mobilize the community through partnerships and a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths and racial disparities to fulfill its vision that every baby born in Cuyahoga County will celebrate a first birthday.

I have worked in maternal and infant health for two decades, mostly in the public health sector. A career centered on public health provides a lens of legislative, structural, and systemic opportunities coupled with evidence based interventions to improve health and well-being at a population health level.

In Cuyahoga County, the health of mom prior to her pregnancy is the 2nd leading contributing factor to infant death behind poverty. With a mission to ensure babies thrive, it is imperative that we also address the needs of birthing people to ensure a successful pregnancy and delivery. First Year Cleveland has been working with partners locally and across the state of Ohio to provide valuable services while also addressing systems' barriers to care and quality of life.

According to the Ohio Department of Health's Report of Pregnancy Related Deaths released in 2023, 73% of Black maternal deaths between 2017-2018 were determined to be preventable. Removing the use of drugs, Black women are 3-4 times more likely to die due to pregnancy related complications. This is a longstanding inequity that must be resolved.

Black Maternal Health Week provides a platform to bring awareness to prevention and intervention strategies and engage providers, systems, legislators, and families around risk and protective factors for maternal mortality and morbidity. Mental health and cardiovascular complications are the leading causes of death to women during pregnancy and within one year of giving birth. Increasing awareness and attention has the potential to save a woman's life by highlighting opportunities for healthcare systems to improve protocols and range of services, in addition to educating birthing people of signs and symptoms for an adverse health outcome.

The root causes for Black maternal and infant mortality and morbidity are rooted in structural and systemic racism, limiting equitable opportunities for quality housing, employment, education, food, transportation, and respectful/responsive healthcare—all things necessary for optimal health and well-being. First Year Cleveland strongly supports Black Maternal Health Week in an effort to ensure that not only Black women, but all birthing people survive and thrive through their pregnancy, delivery, and the healthy development of their children.