

**HEALTHY
MOMS.
STRONG
BABIES.**



Bianca Zarders

Manager, Maternal Infant Health Initiatives

T (513) 712-6838

E bzarders@marchofdimes.org

MARCHOFDIMES.ORG

October 31, 2023

Electronic Mail

Chairman Lipps
Vice Chair Stewart,
Ranking Member Liston
and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B.190, an act to designate the week of April 11th to April 17th as "Black Maternal Health Week". I am Bianca Zarders, March of Dimes Manager of Maternal and Infant Health Initiatives for Ohio. For 85 years, March of Dimes has led the fight for the health of all moms and babies, and we continue that fight today as we work to address issues affecting moms and babies through research, education, programs, and advocacy.

The United States has been facing a maternal and infant health crisis. As we reported in our 2022 Report Card, the United States experiences a greater incidence of preterm birth, infant mortality, and maternal mortality than other nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Overall, March of Dimes rates the U.S. and Ohio's performance as a "D+." with a preterm birth rate of 10.6%. This is a greater rate than Ohio has experienced in more than a decade. Furthermore, infant mortality in Ohio is 6.5%, which is greater than the national rate of 5.4%.

These already unacceptable rates are even greater among Ohio's Black moms and babies. Black mothers deliver babies preterm at a rate of 14.5% compared to non-Hispanic white mothers' rate of 9.6%. Black infant mortality is also staggeringly greater than non-Hispanic whites: 14.1% compared to 5.5%. All of this reinforces the need to draw attention to this public health crisis and recognize the vital ongoing work to reduce these rates and improve the health and lives of Ohio's Black moms and babies.

In 2022, March of Dimes released a report on maternity care which stated that 14.8% of Ohio counties were identified as areas without a hospital or birth centers offering obstetric care or with obstetric providers. Among Black Women, those living in areas of high environmental vulnerability have a 31% increased likelihood of inadequate prenatal care when compared to those living in areas of low environmental vulnerability. We need to do better for moms and babies in Ohio. The week of recognition aims to bring attention to the high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity among Black women in Ohio. We believe that Black Maternal Health Week is also a time for action. As a community, we must address the disparities Black women face and call on all stakeholders—community and elected leaders; researchers; and healthcare providers—to

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increase access to prenatal screening, support, and treatment for pre-existing health conditions, improved access to maternity and delivery care and, strive to make Ohio a model to the nation for maternal and infant health. This bill, H.B.190, increases awareness about the disparities that black women face during pregnancy and childbirth.

March of Dimes thanks the committee for focusing attention on these important public health challenges. As we continue to work on advancing new policies, we must continue to invest in the programs already in our toolbox to improve the health of mothers, infants, and families. March of Dimes stands ready to work with you to achieve that change.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. We look forward to partnering with you for the benefit of Ohio's moms and babies!

Sincerely,
s/ Bianca Zarders