Committees
Criminal Justice
State and Local Government
Finance

Committees:
Finance Subcommittee on Public Safety
Homeland Security
Pensions

Cecil Thomas
State Representative, Ohio House District 25

HB 479 – Designate Ohio Stillbirth Prevention Day
Sponsor Testimony

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Dean and Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 479. This bill seeks to enact Section 5.2471 of the Revised Code to designate September 19 as "Ohio Stillbirth Prevention Day."

National Stillbirth Prevention Day was first recognized by Congress on September 19, 2022, and I commend our nation for taking this important step to acknowledge the work still to be done in this critical area of healthcare. With this bill, however, we hope to initiate a conversation and make a long-term commitment within Ohio to better support our families and actively work toward preventing stillbirths in our state.

In Ohio, there are an average of 883 stillbirths each year, and research shows that nearly one-third of them are preventable. As Representative Holmes has highlighted, Ohio is a statistical outlier when it comes to stillbirths and infant mortality, particularly among our communities of color. From a lack of knowledge about prevention tactics to insufficient support systems, many of our women of color are disproportionately affected by these tragedies. Our state must do better.

Jasmine Abrahams, an Ohio native who lost her son to stillbirth, has dedicated herself to educating other expectant parents and working toward preventing stillbirths in Ohio. In an interview in 2022, she shared:
"While there ultimately was a baby in my arms, he didn't take a breath. He didn't cry. I never saw his eyes. I held him. But he was born into this world sleeping. In that moment when they put him on my chest, everything in me just wanted him to breathe. Everything in me just wanted him to cry."

Her words capture the unimaginable pain that families face when they lose a child to stillbirth, and it's a pain that far too many Ohio families know all too well.

The passage of this bill is an opportunity to start a broader conversation about stillbirth prevention and the care we provide to Ohio families who have experienced or are currently grieving the loss of a child. The 2022 Study on the Associated Risks of Stillbirth found that among mothers who

experienced stillbirth and did not receive support or grief counseling, 42% cited not knowing where to go for help. We must do better. We must ensure that Ohio provides easily accessible resources and support systems to assist families during these unimaginable times.

To the families who have lost a child to stillbirth, this bill represents the state's recognition of your pain and our unwavering commitment to finding pathways toward prevention. We stand with you, and we will continue to work toward ensuring that no other family has to experience this heartbreak.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill and we welcome questions at this time.

Phone: 6144661414 | Email: rep18@ohiohouse.gov | Mail: 77 S. High St, 10th Floor, Columbus OH 43215