

Good afternoon Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 7, bipartisan legislation that aims to enhance the livelihoods of our families and improve maternal health in Ohio.

Ohio has a higher maternal mortality rate than the national average, a higher number of maternal deaths, and a greater number of women diagnosed with postpartum depression. The impact that maternal health has, has been truly overlooked in our state. When a mother dies, the consequences ripple through the entire family. Children lose their primary caregiver, partners lose a spouse, and communities lose a leader, a provider, and an advocate.

Infant mortality has become a public health crisis, with 20,500 infants dying in 2022 (CDC). When an infant dies, parents are left to cope with an unimaginable loss, and the community loses a future generation. The trends in Ohio regarding infant mortality rates and maternal deaths is truly sobering. We all know about the rates for maternal and infant mortality in Ohio are some of the highest in the country. But this disparaging matter that we are all facing as legislators has a solution that I believe can be found in House Bill 7.

After analyzing these trends, we've concluded that Ohio needs to find a way to support women throughout their entire pregnancy and have safeguards for newborns. This is why Representative White, and I developed a comprehensive approach to address these challenges and make Ohio a better place for motherhood, and to raise a family no matter what the conditions.

My colleague did a wonderful job summarizing this very extensive bill, but I want to take the time to highlight components of this bill that are important to me.

House bill 7 would support Healthy Beginnings at Home, a housing initiative for pregnant mothers that would provide stable housing. In your most vulnerable moments, having at least stable housing will provide a solid foundation for motherhood. Also, having a stable housing will significantly reduce preterm births which is proven to have direct impacts on the health of the mother and the infant.

HB 7 modifies several aspects of Help Me Grow in Ohio. The bill supports providing comprehensive in-home services to families, especially those at risk of participating in the child welfare system, with trained professionals. Trained professionals will be required to demonstrate evidence-based home visiting models which will aim to strengthen family well-beings, improve maternal and infant health and prevent child abuse or neglect.

HB 7 as it stands will appropriate about \$34 million dollars over fiscal years 2024-2025 to address several critical priorities, including reducing maternal mortality rates, improving overall health outcomes, expanding mental health services, increasing pre- and postnatal healthcare access, and strengthening support programs for underserved communities. While I recognize that this is a working document, I believe that a targeted focus on reducing infant mortality, expanding home visiting services through programs like Help Me Grow, enhancing rental stabilization initiatives through Healthy Beginnings at Home, and

modernizing WIC could have a transformative impact on the long-term well-being of families across Ohio.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to pass Ohio House Bill 7 out of committee as a step toward addressing the maternal and infant mortality crisis in our state. We cannot afford to wait any longer to take action, and this bill offers a critical opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of mothers and babies.

Citations:

<https://www.cdc.gov/maternal-infant-health/infant-mortality/index.html>