



Advocates for Ohio's Future
Amended Substitute House Bill 7 Proponent Testimony - Written
Senate Finance Committee
December 17, 2024

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Sarah Hudacek and I am the Coalition Manager of Advocates for Ohio's Future. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on House Bill 7, which would take important steps to improve infant and maternal health in Ohio.

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of state and local health and human services policy, advocacy and provider organizations that strive to strengthen families and communities through public funding for health, human services, and early care & education. We work to empower and support nonprofit organizations in the critical work they do, especially as it relates to lifting up the most vulnerable among us.

AOF supports the passage of House Bill 7 to modernize the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), support coordination and collaboration for Help Me Grow, prioritize the most at-risk families for home visiting, and streamline early childhood mental health diagnoses.

Ohio now ranks 41st in infant and maternal mortality, and the rate of Ohioans dying from pregnancy-related complications is only increasing. Black babies in Ohio are 2.7 times more likely to die before their first birthday than white babies. Compared to the state overall, Ohio children experience higher rates of poverty and food insecurity, with 17.7 percent of Ohio children living in poverty and 14.8 percent of children not having access to adequate food.

These factors and more combine to create Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are potentially traumatic events that take place during childhood. Exposure to ACEs can impact long-term mental and physical health, smoking, substance use, and can lead to disease and premature death.

HB 7 makes vital advancements towards preventing ACEs, addressing the social determinants of health, and bolstering the wraparound supports new families need to be well.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. We ask that you support House Bill 7 and we look forward to working with you to invest in maternal and infant health in the 136th General Assembly.