



# THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

December 16, 2024

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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, and Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 7. My name is Tara Britton and I am the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at The Center for Community Solutions. The Center for Community Solutions (CCS) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that aims to improve health, social and economic conditions through research, policy analysis and communication. My testimony today will focus on the WIC portions of this bill.


One key tool to provide nutrition, education, support and resources to pregnant women and families in the extended postpartum period is WIC. WIC is a vital nutrition program for families with young children, but we are not reaching nearly enough eligible participants. Research demonstrates WIC's effectiveness at improving health and nutritional outcomes of both women and children. WIC enrollment reduces infant mortality, especially for Black participants. A recent study looked at the rates of infant mortality in babies whose mothers participate in WIC during pregnancy and found that the infant mortality rate was 5.2 deaths per 1,000 live births among those who had received WIC benefits, compared to 8.2 deaths among those who did not — cutting infant mortality by more than a third.

Like other benefit programs, WIC requires participants to recertify their enrollment in and need for the program every so often. In Ohio, this time period is every six months. And in Ohio, like only 8 other states in the nation, we require WIC participants to physically visit their local WIC office to have their cards reloaded. We are considered an offline state.

Community Solutions and our partners at Children's Defense Fund and the Ohio Association of Foodbanks have been working over the last several years to push Ohio toward moving its WIC program online and are very excited to hear the Ohio Department of Health is closer than ever to this goal. We appreciate Representatives White and Humphrey including recommendations to improve Ohio's WIC program and including the report back to the General Assembly on the progress. We are hopeful that the push in House Bill 7 to move Ohio online, take full advantage of federally-funded opportunities to modernize WIC and fully reach all eligible families in Ohio will yield positive results.

Our partners will expertly cover the other elements of this bill, which we know has gone through many changes over its time in the General

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Assembly. We stand ready and willing throughout the rest of this lame duck period to help, and looking ahead to next year, we will continue to work to improve maternal and infant health in this state.

Thank you for your time. You can reach me at [tbritton@communitysolutions.com](mailto:tbritton@communitysolutions.com) with any questions.

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