



Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Substitute House Bill 7: Enact the Strong Foundations Act
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Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Substitute House Bill 7, to Enact the Strong Foundations Act. My name is Danielle Tong, and I proudly serve as Executive Director of CelebrateOne.

CelebrateOne is the City of Columbus' infant mortality reduction initiative, charged with improving our community's social and economic conditions and systems of care so that every parent and child is able to thrive to and through the first year of life. As a collective impact backbone organization, we work with multiple state and local entities—including grassroots, nonprofit, and human service organizations—that strive to strengthen and re-empower families and communities through programming, direct service and resource provision, and education. Together, we are working toward a vision of a healthier and more resilient future for all Franklin County families.

Today, I join public health professionals, maternal and infant health advocates, and families across the state in support of Substitute House Bill 7. I have shared my own birthing story publicly before, where I experienced an unexpected, life-threatening complication at 29 weeks that nearly took my life and that of my now eight-year-old son. What I have not shared are the very real challenges that come with having a preterm baby: neonatal intensive care stays, increased risks for sleep-related infant deaths and long-term chronic health conditions, frequent doctor visits, additional supports needed in school, and the list goes on. I am fortunate to have the means and supports to navigate this journey, but what about the families in Ohio that do not?

I wish I could say that my experience is unique, but unfortunately, it's more common than most people realize. From 2016-2019, nearly 4,000 Ohio residents experienced severe maternal morbidities, or pregnancy or delivery-related complications with major health consequences (*Severe Maternal Morbidity and Racial Disparities in Ohio, 2016-2019*). From 2017-2018 in our state, 72 women died as a result of their pregnancies (*A Report on Pregnancy-Related Deaths in Ohio, 2017-2018*). What's more, hundreds of Ohio's babies die before their first birthdays each year, and even more have long-lasting health effects that come from being born too soon.

Substitute House Bill 7 as it was introduced was poised to make a significant impact on maternal and infant health outcomes in our state. While the appropriations have since been removed, CelebrateOne still believes that this bill is crucial for supporting and elevating the health of the families that look to us and our partners for help. So many families have expressed a need for a modernized WIC system so that they don't have to miss work to have their benefits reloaded; they need access to affordable, quality child care options to pursue work, education, and other economic mobility activities; and they need information, resources, and supports from trusted entities, like home visitors. Increased collaboration, accountability, and communication, in addition to needed process and systems improvements, within and among state governmental agencies will have real-world implications on the lives of people in Franklin County and all across Ohio.

Crucial investments in the programs and strategies that have been shown to support the health and wellbeing of Ohio families are still greatly needed, but I do believe that Substitute House Bill 7, as it's currently written, takes important steps towards preventing adverse birth outcomes for Ohio's most vulnerable residents.

On behalf of CelebrateOne and all of the partners and Franklin County residents that look to us, I thank the Senate Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of Substitute House Bill 7. We appreciate your time and consideration and I am happy to answer any questions in-person or by email at dptong@columbus.gov.