



Testimony of First Year Cleveland  
The Ohio Senate  
Health Committee  
May 10, 2023

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson and Ranking Member Antonio, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of First Year Cleveland. My name is Angela Newman-White, and I am First Year Cleveland's Executive Director.

Founded in 2015, First Year Cleveland was created in response to the record high infant mortality rate of 18.5 for black infants as compared to a rate of 5.5 for white infants. This public/private partnership supports communities, aligns programs, and advocates for fair and just policies that address racial inequities in birth and health outcomes.

First Year Cleveland's mission is to mobilize the community through partnerships and a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths and racial disparities to fulfill its vision that every baby born in Cuyahoga County will celebrate a first birthday. Our mission is supported through our four strategic priorities: 1) Reducing prematurity; 2) Addressing social drivers to poor health; 3) Dismantling racism in healthcare; and 4) Investing in communities.

On behalf of our partners and the families we serve, I would like to say thank you to Governor DeWine, his administration, and you, the members of the General Assembly, for your continued support for families to thrive.

Since 2015, we have worked in partnership with the Ohio Department of Health, Department of Medicaid, and local community programs such as the Ohio Equity Institute, Birthing Beautiful Communities, MomsFirst, Help Me Grow, Moms and Babies First, and Nurse Family Partnership to address gaps in services and identify system change needs that improve quality and access to care. Though we have seen an improvement in infant mortality since 2015, racial inequities persist. With a healthy people 2030 goal of 5.0, Black families experienced a preliminary 2022 infant mortality rate of 13.03 compared to a rate of 3.99 for White families.

The leading risk factor for infant death and many other adverse outcomes in Cuyahoga County continues to be poverty. Economic challenges impact access to safe and quality housing, education, healthy food, transportation, and healthcare, all things needed to thrive.

With costs rising and wages remaining stagnant, it is difficult for families to survive. According to 2019 US Census Data, 35.2% of Cleveland residents live in poverty and the child poverty rate

is at 48.7%. The current minimum wage in Ohio is now \$10.10/hour, which at full time is \$21,008 a year. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a single individual would need to make \$17.05/hour while working 40 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment. In many households in the City of Cleveland, rent accounts for more than 45% of the household income, limiting resources for day to day living. A single mother would need to work 68 hours a week under current minimum wage to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

In 2018, less than one-third (29.5%) of children ages 0-5 experiencing homelessness in Ohio were able to access housing services. The Healthy Beginnings at Home program, which provides safe, stable housing to pregnant women who are at risk of poor outcomes, has proven success in strengthening health outcomes for babies. The Budget as proposed by the Governor and as passed by the House contains an additional \$17 million for Healthy Beginnings at Home to expand into new communities across the state. Expanding access to the Healthy Beginnings at Home program can ensure that more pregnant women and new mothers have access to housing stability, supporting infant health outcomes and economic security for families.

Increasing the capacity and access to high quality childcare is essential to support families getting back to work and become financially stable. By increasing the eligibility for childcare support, more families will be able to get back to work. This cannot be done without addressing the workforce shortage in childcare and educational settings. Considerations must be made to increase wages and support for childcare institutions to meet the needs of families.

Your support for these valued interventions and family supports will provide many families the opportunity to receive high quality services that will lead to better outcomes. It is important to remember that creating conditions for all families to thrive will lead to the best possible outcomes for our communities.

Thank you for your time today. With your support, we can better ensure first birthdays and healthy moms for every family in Cuyahoga County.