



House Bill 96 - State operating appropriations for FY 2026-27

Testimony before the House Children and Human Services Committee March 5, 2025

Chairwoman White, Ranking Member Salvo, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, I am Krista Wasowski, Medina County Health Commissioner and Treasurer of the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners (AOHC). AOHC represents the 111 local health districts across Ohio. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 96, specifically the proposed initiative in the budget of the Department of Children and Youth to expand Nurse Home Visiting to all 88 counties .

Consider the following statistics:

- ❖ In 2021, 912 babies in Ohio died before their first birthday. This equates to 43 kindergarten classrooms full of children. In Ohio, the overall infant mortality rate increased from 2020 to 2021 and Black infants are 2.6 times more likely to die before their first birthday than white infants.¹
- ❖ In an average week in Ohio, 264 babies are born preterm.²
- ❖ Pregnancy-related deaths have increased in Ohio. Most pregnancy-related deaths in Ohio occur during the postpartum period and are preventable.³
- ❖ Evidence shows that Public Health Nurse home visiting programs can make a positive impact in the lives of their clients and their families.^{4,5,6,7}
- ❖ Home visiting programs have also been shown to produce healthcare cost savings, acting as a key point of prevention.^{8,9,10,11}
- ❖ Infant mortality is preventable. Leading causes of infant death in Ohio like prematurity and obstetric conditions can be mitigated through appropriate interventions that home visiting nurses can provide their clients.
- ❖ Families enrolled in evidence-based home visiting prenatally are less likely to have a premature baby.¹¹

For more than 100 years, local public health departments have been providing nurse home visiting services. Today, Ohio's public health nurses utilize their expertise in home visiting and case management through various state and local programs, including Help Me Grow, Early Intervention, the state program for children requiring Complex Medical Help, county created newborn home visiting programs. Unfortunately, due to funding, these programs are not consistently available across all communities, and the need far outpaces the current capacity.

AOHC strongly believes that an investment in Nurse Home Visiting will significantly improve the health outcomes of mothers and their newborns. Analyses from some local programs showed direct positive outcomes among their home-visiting clients, including identification and immediate referral for postpartum depression, communication with pediatricians for failure to thrive, breastfeeding support, and connection to community programs. One local health department saw a decrease in the African American infant mortality rate by more than half, as compared to the Caucasian mortality rate through their local nurse home visiting program.

Local health commissioners are each members by statute of their local Family and Children First Council, which connects all agencies serving families in a county. By statute we also conduct child fatality reviews, and many of us have extended that to include fetal fatality reviews. We are therefore keenly aware of the health issues facing pregnant and post-partum women and their newborns in this state. Seeing the statistics for women and newborns in Ohio and knowing that an evidence-based program exists that can be implemented is what brings me to testify before you today.

AOHC asks that you vote favorably for the proposed initiative in the budget of the Department of Children and Youth to expand nurse home visiting statewide.

Thank you for your time and attention today. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

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References

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2. [Ohio Department of Health Infant Vitality](#)
3. [March of Dimes PeriStats State Summary for Ohio](#)
4. [Ohio Department of Health Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review](#)
5. [Public Health Nurse Tailored Home Visiting and Parenting Behavior for Families at Risk for Referral to Child Welfare Services, Colorado: 2018–2019](#)
6. [Effect of a Community Agency–Administered Nurse Home Visitation Program on Program Use and Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes](#)
7. [The advantages of home visits compared to providing care in a clinic setting: Maria Jensberg Leirbakk](#)
8. [Health Families America Evidence of Effectiveness](#)
9. [Washington State Institute for Public Policy Other home visiting programs for at-risk families](#)
10. [RAND Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise](#)
11. [The Center for American Progress Medicaid and Home Visiting](#)