



**House Finance Committee
House Bill 96
Richard Stacklin, Director of Community Impact
First Year Cleveland
March 11, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Richard Stacklin, and I am the Director of Community Impact at First Year Cleveland. Our mission is to mobilize the community through partnerships and a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths. We are committed to ensuring that every baby lives to see their first birthday, and every mother has the resources and support to celebrate that milestone.

First Year Cleveland is a collective impact organization that provides support for community organizations through shared strategy development, implementation, training, and capacity-building efforts. As a trusted partner and connector within the community, we have successfully identified and implemented strategies to address the needs of families and community partners. A few examples of our past successes include the rollout of a comprehensive safe sleep campaign with training, the launch of the Healthy Beginnings at Home research project, and our partnership with Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA).

One of the key issues we have identified in addressing infant mortality is housing insecurity, particularly among pregnant and postpartum families. Stable housing is a critical protective factor against infant mortality, yet the demand for housing among pregnant women in Cleveland continues to rise. Over the past two years, we have worked with maternity housing providers in Cleveland to develop and implement strategies that address the needs of our most vulnerable communities. The launch of the Healthy Beginnings at Home research project through the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) is just one illustration of how we are working to meet the growing housing needs for pregnant and postpartum families.

From 2017 to 2023, Cuyahoga County saw 759 infant deaths and 595 fetal deaths, totaling over 1,350 families who endured the heartbreak of loss. Despite the support we have received from the Ohio Departments of Medicaid and Children and Youth, COHHIO, and local philanthropic organizations, the need continues to grow both in Cleveland and throughout Ohio. It is critical that we not only provide necessary support for pregnant and parenting families but also ensure that families have access to basic needs like housing, food, transportation, and employment.

On behalf of the families we serve, **I respectfully request your support of a budget amendment that would allocate \$300,000 in each fiscal year to support First Year Cleveland's initiatives.** These funds would enable us to continue working with our community partners to develop and implement effective solutions aimed at reducing infant mortality, improving the health and well-being of mothers and babies, and strengthening the infrastructure needed to sustain these efforts throughout Cuyahoga County and beyond.

We are deeply grateful for the support of Governor DeWine, his administration, and you, the members of the General Assembly, for your continued commitment to helping families thrive. With your support, we can help mothers across Cuyahoga County and Ohio access the resources they need to protect their health and the health of their babies.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.