



Testimony before the House Finance committee

April 03, 2025

Dr Guillermo Bervejillo, Research Manager  
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

## Testimony in opposition of the proposed Substitute Budget Bill

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeny, and members of the House Finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Guillermo Bervejillo, and I serve as the Research Manager for Children's Defense Fund- Ohio. We are a statewide, multi-issue, child advocacy organization that has worked on behalf of children and families in Ohio for forty-three years. Our mission is to build community so young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy.

I am here in opposition to the provision in the proposed Substitute Budget Bill that restricts Medicaid coverage for doula services (MCD62 Doula services, R.C. 5164.071).

This provision stands in direct contradiction to Governor DeWine's stated commitment to reducing infant mortality rates. The proposed \$500,000 cap on Medicaid reimbursements and the restriction to only six counties would severely restrict access to essential doula services for low-income expectant mothers in Ohio.

### Critical Issues with This Provision:

- **Ignores Where Infant Deaths Are Most Prevalent** – The bill restricts Medicaid coverage of doula services to six counties based on *infant mortality rates*, yet the highest number of actual infant deaths occur in Ohio's largest cities, including Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati—none of which would be covered under this restriction. This approach misallocates resources, leaving the most affected communities without support. Please see table below:

## Infant Mortality in Ohio, 2024

Note: Counties with fewer than five infant deaths not included

#	County	Birth Count	Death Count	Infant Mortality Rate	Major City
1	Scioto	785	11	14.01	Portsmouth
2	Jackson	371	5	13.48	Jackson
3	Shelby	626	8	12.78	Shelby
4	Huron	613	7	11.42	Huron
5	Auglaize	535	6	11.21	Wapakoneta
6	Athens	476	5	10.50	Athens
7	Clark	1,734	18	10.38	Springfield
8	Jefferson	646	6	9.29	Steubenville
9	Cuyahoga	12,445	111	8.92	Cleveland
10	Lucas	4,523	40	8.84	Toledo
11	Knox	695	6	8.63	Mount Vernon
12	Sandusky	605	5	8.26	Sandusky
13	Summit	5,368	43	8.01	Akron
14	Butler	4,249	33	7.77	Hamilton

Table: CDF-Ohio • Source: Data.ohio.gov • Created with Datawrapper

- **Fails to Provide Meaningful Coverage** – Medicaid reimburses doulas at \$1,200 per birth, meaning the entire \$500,000 budget would support fewer than 416 births statewide. In a state struggling with maternal and infant health disparities, this is woefully inadequate.
- **Neglects Proven Cost Savings** – Research shows that doula care reduces complications like preterm births and C-sections, leading to lower healthcare costs. Limiting access to doulas could ultimately increase medical expenses for both families and the state.

Ohio has an opportunity to improve birth outcomes and maternal health through expanded doula services, but this provision does the opposite. I urge the committee to remove these restrictions and instead work toward making doula care accessible to all who need it.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.