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**Ohio House Health Committee
House Bill 4
Groundwork Ohio
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Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani and members of the committee, my name is Dominique Johnson, and I am a Policy Associate with Groundwork Ohio. As someone who has personally lost a child to stillbirth back in 2020, I am grateful to have the opportunity to share proponent testimony on House Bill 4 to designate September 19th as Stillbirth Prevention Day.

Groundwork Ohio is a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization championing high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families, and communities.

Stillbirth, also referred to as fetal death, is the loss of a fetus at or after 20 weeks of pregnancy. This outcome requires mothers to give birth through induced labor, Cesarean birth, or other means. In 2021, the *Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth* (otherwise known as Ohio SOARS), reported 761 stillbirths in our state, an average of 6.2 fetal deaths per 1,000 live births.ⁱ This data mirrors Ohio's infant mortality rates, only slightly worse at 7.0 deaths per 1,000 live births in the same year.ⁱⁱ

Ohio's Infant Mortality Rate Over Time

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Overall	7.6	7.4	6.8	7.2	7.4	7.2	6.9	6.9	6.7	7.0

Stillbirth is a profoundly devastating loss – a pain that lingers for a lifetime for families - yet it remains an underrecognized public health crisis. For me the hardest part of losing my child to stillbirth was feeling alone in my pain. Most of the time when you lose someone in your life, whether it be a friend, family member or even a child, they have lived a life and other people share the pain in their loss and even in fun memories with

that person. When you lose a child due to stillbirth only you know what's it's like to feel the life of that child. You have felt the movement and shared a body together. I had people around me tell me to just go have another baby as if that child could somehow take the place of my daughter I had lost. Only having a picture of a baby after they pass makes it difficult to share in the small moment you had with your child. I'd love to have her picture on my desk at work or even hang it on a wall in my house because while that's the only tangible thing I have it's difficult for others to see. I still think of my daughter every day and the life I wished for her and what I could have done differently.

The fact is the exact cause of fetal death is not always identifiable, several risk factors have been well-documented, including ⁱⁱⁱ

- Medical conditions, such as diabetes, obesity, or high blood pressure.
- Lack of access to quality prenatal care, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Ohio SOARS data reveals 16% of mothers who experienced stillbirth did not receive prenatal care during the first trimester.
- Additional risk factors include: pregnancy-related conditions and history, such as being pregnant with more than one baby, first pregnancy, maternal age of 35 and over, or environmental exposures to pollution.
- And finally, social factors and health disparities, often called *social determinants of health*, these factors are influenced by the conditions into which you are born, grow, work, live, and age.

Even with me seeming healthy, at only 33years old at the time of my pregnancy, and making every prenatal visit, I believe there were more than one of the factors on the list impacted my loss. There is no real way of knowing. I do know, though, that experts estimate that nearly one in four stillbirths are potentially preventable.^{iv} One in four women who we can help to not have to go through the pain I went through and, in many ways, still go through. This bill offers an exciting opportunity to bring stillbirth out of the shadows and elevate solutions while emphasizing the need for continued research. Groundwork Ohio fully supports House Bill 4 to designate Stillbirth Prevention Day, and we are pleased to see this legislation as we seek your support. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

ⁱ In 2021, the *Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth* (otherwise known as Ohio SOARS), reported 761 stillbirths in our state, an average of 6.2 fetal deaths per 1,000 live births.[i] [i] Ohio SOARS Survey. (2021). [Selected Findings from the 2021 Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth](#) (Ohio SOARS). [1] Ohio SOARS Survey. (2021). [Selected Findings from the 2021 Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth](#) (Ohio SOARS).

This data mirrors Ohio's infant mortality rates, only slightly worse at 7.0 deaths per 1,000 live births in the same year.[ii][ii] Groundwork Ohio. (2024). [INFANT MORTALITY IN OHIO: A 10-Year look at the impact of policy changes and opportunities for the future.](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ the exact cause of fetal death is not always identifiable, several risk factors have been well-documented, including:[iii] [iii] Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). [About Stillbirth.](#)

^{iv} Experts estimate that nearly one in four stillbirths are potentially preventable.[iv] [iv] Page, J. M., et. al. (2018). [Potentially preventable stillbirth in a diverse U.S. cohort.](#) *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 131(2), 336–343. <https://doi.org/10.1097/aog.0000000000002421>