



**Interested Party Testimony- Senate Finance Committee  
HB 96 — FY26-27 State Operating Budget  
May 28, 2025**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee — Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 96 in support of Pregnant with Possibilities' funding request which would appropriate \$200,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Children and Youth's Infant Vitality line to expand and deepen the impact of perinatal services for moms and infants. These evidence-based interventions significantly enhance the probability of infants reaching their first year of life.

My name is Veranda Rogers, and I am the founder, President and Chief Executive Officer of Pregnant with Possibilities Resource Center. *I was born on purpose, for a purpose, and for the purpose that I serve.* What does that mean?

I am a rainbow baby, conceived after two consecutive miscarriages. Doctors told my mother she would never be able to carry a child to term, yet here I stand—a living, breathing testament to the possibility that babies can live, thrive and celebrate milestones and birthdays.

For a purpose: I became a mother just two weeks after my 17th birthday. That experience shaped my passion and resilience, driving me to lead by example, push past excuses, and refuse to let my circumstances define my future. As a first-generation college graduate, I made it my mission to inspire others to become the best versions of themselves. Life happens *for* you, not *to* you—every challenge is an opportunity to turn lemons into lemonade.

And for the purpose that I serve: Ten years ago, I began this work with a narrow focus, unaware of the stark realities Black women and babies face—not just in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, but nationally. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black women are at least three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women. In 2023, the Cuyahoga County infant mortality rate was 15.9 and in Cleveland 16.1 this is 3x more the national average of 5.61. Despite the presence of nationally recognized hospital systems, statistics demonstrate that the maternal health needs of non-Hispanic Black women are not being met in Cuyahoga County. Lack of access, poor-quality care, and implicit bias all play a role in these statistics. I firmly believe that if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. That's why I stand as an advocate every day, fighting to improve health equity for birthing individuals and their families.

Pregnant with Possibilities Resource Center (PPRC) was founded in 2015. We are a nonprofit organization located on Cleveland's east side with the mission to provide education, perinatal support, tools, and techniques that equip individuals to overcome barriers to give birth to their goals. In 2024, Pregnant with Possibilities Resource Center served nearly 300 families through our community-based model and additionally supported nearly 500 families with support of diapers, wipes, and formula. Of those served, 80% reached full term in their pregnancies. Of note, nearly half of our clients had experienced a previous traumatic pregnancy like stillbirth, miscarriage, complicated deliveries, etc. prior to joining our program. We walk side-by-side with



these women to promote and foster a healthy pregnancy so they may bring healthy babies into this world.

Maternal health, including mental health, and infant mortality are crisis in Ohio and outcomes are even worse for Black women. Of the many factors contributing to poor outcomes, lack of resources and support can be addressed with a community-based approach. Pregnant with Possibilities Resource Center offers much-needed support to Black moms, families, and babies in Cuyahoga County giving hope to future generations, because we know healthier moms lead to healthier babies.

Conversations about maternal health must prioritize mental well-being, as the perinatal period—the time from pregnancy through the first year postpartum—is a significant transition that can lead to heightened anxiety and stress for many women. During this time, approximately 85% of women experience some form of mood disturbance. Tragically, suicide has become one of the leading causes of maternal mortality, accounting for about 20% of postpartum deaths. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that Black women are at least three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women. While infant mortality rates have steadily declined over the past decade, Black babies in Ohio still face a rate that is 164% higher than that of White babies.

Our Making Opportunities Matter (MOM) Program is a research-driven initiative designed specifically for individuals who are pregnant or up to 11 months postpartum. The program provides education on topics such as healthy pregnancy, stress management, and financial planning. Participants connect with Community Health Workers to address barriers and access community-based resources such as support to address basic needs along with doula or medical services. Delivered through a group-based, client-centered care model, the curriculum fosters a supportive and empowering environment for participants. Unstable housing, lack of food access, and transportation and stress all contribute to infant and maternal death. In addition to offering rental/utility assistance, in 2024 we provided over 500 bus passes or private Lyft rides.

I wanted to share two quotes from our clients who have done the program, as they are the real voices you need to hear and why we do what we do.

“Pregnant with Possibilities really changed my life — actually saved my life — because I was so depressed and not knowing what to do as far as finding that balance between being a mom and also taking care of myself. I learned that you have to prioritize yourself because if you don’t take care of yourself, who will take care of your babies. Coming here really gave me a family-based program and I keep my depression at bay versus letting it overtake me and making me feel like I want to give up.”

“For me, it has been a healthy outlet that gives me tools to keep moving forward. It wasn’t a place where I’m just venting, but educational as well. One of the things I really enjoyed was being able to have an accountability partner. Both of our due dates were on the same exact day. We bonded and really got to know each other. I gained a sister in the process.”

As a community-based organization, Pregnant with Possibilities has an in-depth understanding of the unique needs of its clientele and are well-equipped to offer the resources that best support the



well-being of their community. In the realm of infant and maternal health, a community-based approach has proven to be particularly effective in promoting better outcomes. Pregnant with Possibilities provides tailored services that are responsive to the specific needs of the community, all within environments where individuals feel safe, supported, and comfortable.

I kindly ask support for Pregnant with Possibilities' funding request which would appropriate \$200,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Children and Youth Infant Vitality line to us community-based services to improve birth outcomes in Ohio.

Thank you and I am happy to take any questions at this time.

Veranda Rodgers

President and Chief Executive Officer  
Pregnant with Possibilities Resource Center