

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 96**  
**The Senate Finance Committee**  
**May 30, 2025**

**Maya Dunson, Medical Student**

Chair Jerry Cirino, Vice Chair Brian Chavez, Ranking Member Paula Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong opposition to House Bill 96.

My name is Maya Dunson. I'm a proud Ohio native and a current medical student at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. I'm here today not on behalf of any organization, but as a concerned citizen and future physician who cares deeply about the health and well-being of families in this state. I strongly oppose several provisions in House Bill 96—especially those that impact maternal and infant health, early childhood development, and the broader public health of our communities. These changes would disproportionately harm children and families across Ohio, particularly those who are already facing barriers due to race, income, or geography.

Before starting medical school, I earned a Master of Public Health, where I focused on research and developing initiatives addressing public health disparities within the United States. Through that experience, I became especially aware of the deep challenges surrounding maternal and infant mortality, and how these issues disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. These disparities are not just national—they are happening right here in Ohio. In 2023, it was found that maternal mortality rates in the U.S. were significantly higher than those in other developed countries, and Ohio's rates were slightly above the national average. We see the same trend with infant mortality and preterm birth rates, particularly among Black families and individuals with lower socioeconomic status. These disparities don't end at birth—they continue into early childhood, influencing everything from developmental outcomes to long-term health.

These public health challenges highlight just how essential it is to invest in programs that support maternal and child health. Unfortunately, House Bill 96 threatens to dismantle key supports in the following ways:

**1. Cuts to Maternal, Infant, and Child Health Community Programs**

HB 96 proposes a 27% cut to Help Me Grow, a statewide program that connects pregnant individuals and families with young children to home visits, developmental screenings, and other critical resources. This program plays a direct role in reducing infant mortality, supporting early childhood development, and helping families build stable foundations. Cutting its funding will make it harder for Ohio families—especially those in under-resourced communities—to access the care and support they need.

The bill also includes reductions in child care funding, eliminates continuous Medicaid coverage for children, and removes early childhood development initiatives and tools such as the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). All of these cuts would have negative effects on child development. Without Medicaid continuity, children could miss screenings for developmental delays, physical and mental health conditions, and other time-sensitive issues. Eliminating the KRA would also take away one of the only standardized tools we have to determine whether a child is prepared for school and what support they might need.

## 2. Lack of Access to Doula Services Statewide

HB 96 does continue Medicaid reimbursement for doulas in Ohio, but only in **six counties** with the highest infant mortality rates—leaving **82 counties without access**. That means families who rely on Medicaid in most of the state won't have coverage for doula care, even though we know doulas improve maternal and infant outcomes, reduce complications, and provide crucial support during pregnancy, labor, and postpartum.

This restriction disproportionately affects low-income and minority communities, where patients often struggle to feel seen and heard in healthcare settings. Doulas help bridge that gap—offering emotional support, advocacy, and continuity of care. Lack of doula access for all Ohioans in need would be detrimental to maternal and infant morbidity and mortality, especially in regions where access is already limited.

As a medical student—and a future OB/GYN—House Bill 96 raises deep concerns for me. It directly impacts the very populations I am committed to serving now and throughout my career. These proposed cuts will place an even greater burden on underserved communities, especially families who rely on programs like Help Me Grow, doula care, and continuous Medicaid coverage to navigate pregnancy, early childhood, and healthcare access.

As someone who advocates for Black and marginalized communities, I know how devastating these gaps in care can be—not just in statistics, but in real lives lost or opportunities missed. We have the tools to do better. We just need the commitment to protect and fund what works. I respectfully urge you to reject House Bill 96 in its current form and take action to revise its provisions. We need to invest in the health and futures of Ohio's mothers, children, and families—not roll back the progress we've made.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Maya Dunson  
Medical Student & Concerned Ohio Citizen

