



**Senate Health Committee  
House Bill 96  
Angela Newman-White, Executive Director  
First Year Cleveland  
May 13, 2025**

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 96. My name is Angela Newman-White, and I serve as the Executive Director of First Year Cleveland. Our organization works through partnerships and a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths. Our mission is rooted in the belief that every child in Ohio deserves a chance to celebrate their first birthday, and that every parent should have the tools and support to reach that milestone.

On behalf of our network of partners and the families we serve, we are grateful for the continued commitment to Ohio families. Your leadership has strengthened our communities and reaffirmed the value this state places on protecting life from its earliest stages.

In Cuyahoga County alone, between 2017 and 2023, there were 767 infant deaths and 595 fetal deaths – over 1,350 families who've suffered the grief no parent should endure. We know that strong families are the cornerstone of strong communities, and now is the time to prioritize proven, effective investments in maternal and infant health that save lives and protect taxpayer dollars by preventing costly health complications down the line.

We respectfully urge this committee to restore the Infant Vitality Funds to the \$7.5 million per year level proposed in the Governor's budget. This funding empowers faith-based and community organizations to provide critical front-line services, such as safe sleep education, prenatal care, and patient navigation support. The House reduction to \$6 million per year will diminish the reach of these trusted providers, especially in underserved communities where health disparities persist.

We are also concerned about the significant cut to the Help Me Grow program in Fiscal Year 2027. Governor DeWine's proposed \$85.5 million investment reflects a commitment to early intervention through evidence-based approaches like Family Connects, a nurse-home visiting program that strengthens parenting skills and reduces long-term public health burdens. The House reduction of more than \$22 million would undercut this progress. We respectfully urge the Senate to restore full funding and protect the foundation of Ohio's early childhood health strategy.

In addition, we applaud the Governor's proposal of a state-level Child Tax Credit, which would provide targeted relief that puts resources directly in the hands of working families with young children. Unfortunately, the House removed this provision. We encourage the Senate to reinstate this provision and continue advancing policies that promote work and strengthen family stability.

In his executive budget, Governor DeWine also proposed raising the eligibility threshold for Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) to 160% of the federal poverty level. The House, however, kept it at the current 145%. We urge the Senate to reinstate the 160% eligibility level and to fully fund the Child Care Choice Voucher program at \$75 million in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$150 million in Fiscal Year 2027.

We recognize that many families across Ohio are doing their best in the face of rising costs. A full-time minimum wage worker brings home about \$22,000 a year, while the cost of stable housing for a parent far exceeds that. Programs like Healthy Beginnings at Home help fill that gap, offering expecting mothers a safe environment to prepare for parenthood. We also recommend prioritizing pregnant women facing housing instability within public housing programs – a targeted approach that benefits two generations at once.

At the same time, we appreciate that the House version of the budget preserved and introduced several positive provisions, including:

- The continuation of \$500,000 per fiscal year for maternal and infant housing assistance, which plays a crucial role in reducing risks during pregnancy and birth;
- The creation of the Child Care Cred Program, which shares the cost of child care between working parents, their employers, and the Department of Children and Youth – a model of shared responsibility and support for working families.

Thank you for your time and leadership. On behalf of the families we serve and the organizations we partner with, I urge you to uphold Ohio's commitment to life, health, and family by restoring and maintaining funding for these critical programs. I welcome any questions you may have.