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Testimony to the State of Ohio Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform
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Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Seitz, Ranking member Yuko, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on House Bill 294.

My name is Melissa LaManna and I live and work in Mahoning County, Ohio. I have been an employee of Planned Parenthood for over 16 years. I started as a health educator for the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention Program and for the past 14 years I have served as the Program Manager for the Ohio Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative in Mahoning County and Trumbull County. Planned Parenthood has managed this program since 1996.

We are a home visiting program that works with the highest risk population in the inner cities of Youngstown and Warren, some of the poorest and highest crime neighborhoods. We work with African American women with high risk pregnancies. Our program allows us to continue to work with these women through their pregnancy up to 2 years after birth of their child.

Over the years, our Community Health workers have worked for years to build relationships throughout the community in order to earn the trust of clients serviced by the program at Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio. We get in the door when other agencies and programs cannot. Often times, our program staff lives and works in the same neighborhoods as our clients.

On a daily basis, our program works with women that have life experiences that you wouldn't wish on anyone - from the pregnant young woman who is living from house to house sleeping on someone's couch with her other small children, the teen who has hidden her pregnancy from her family because she's not sure who the father is and has had no prenatal care, the women that live in domestic violence situations, the woman that has witnessed the murder of her baby's father because of a drug deal gone wrong. We know that the stress that these pregnant women have affects the outcomes of their births. Every baby born to these mothers deserves to reach their first birthday. I could go on and on with hundreds of stories over the years of the women we have helped get into prenatal care, found mental health resources, medical care, a safe place to live, basic survival items like food and clothing, finish her education or even find a job.

Our program at Planned Parenthood has rich history of long-term because of the work we do and on the referral from previous clients' positive experiences.

House Bill 294 seeks to remove the funding for this program that is specifically in place to combat the infant mortality issue in Ohio. Losing these funds would mean that these women would potentially lose the one person who she trusts, who listens to her, who doesn't judge her, who she leans on for support. More importantly losing these funds could mean that one more baby may not reach its first birthday in our communities.

Ohio is working hard to decrease the infant mortality rate. Please don't add to the infant mortality issue in Ohio by defunding Planned Parenthood. We need to be working side by side.

Thank you for listening and please vote against defunding Planned Parenthood.