



2021

Dear Chairman **Dolan**, Vice Chair **Gavarone**, Ranking Member **Sykes**, and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify on **House Bill 110**. I am the Director of Operations of Elizabeth's New Life Center, which operates eight Women's Centers, also known as Pregnancy Resource Centers, in southwest Ohio. We have now been serving women and families for 32 years. Elizabeth's New Life Center (ENLC) was awarded and is currently receiving funding from the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program (OPP). While we are grateful that the funding has been switched back to the "TANF state maintenance of effort funds", and the timeline has been improved for getting this funding out, we are very disappointed that the amount of funding is less than the last biennium budget. We have been able to provide incredible services to at-risk pregnant women with the help of OPP funding and want to ask that **INCREASED Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy funding be made available in the Ohio Budget**. Last budget period the funding was at **\$7.5M per biennium** and we are recommending it **be increased to \$10M**. This increase fits perfectly into Governor's DeWine initiatives to improve the wellbeing of Children throughout Ohio.

With Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program funding, we have served over 2,400 TANF-eligible clients in 2020 who are pregnant or have a child under 12 months old.

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Because we operate eight Women's Centers and because so many low-income women come to us early in their pregnancies, we are in a unique position to encourage early prenatal care, which in turn reduces infant mortality.

With Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program funding, we have been able to hire new staff for a call center, which connects clients to the Women's Center nearest to them and ensures consistent follow-up. We have also initiated educational series on Safe Sleep and Child Spacing, expanded our Nurturing Parenting program which helps prevent child abuse and neglect, and hired a Men's Mentorship coordinator to build a program specifically designed to help fathers. Since the advent of COVID-19, our Women's Centers have converted to offering individual and group classes virtually through our Earn While You Learn program, and participants can earn incentives (*Baby Bucks*) through both group classes and individual mentoring sessions. This material assistance helps low income women and their partners gather much-needed supplies and baby equipment to create a safe environment for their infants. Services continue after birth as well, so that families can successfully address parenting challenges and continue to "earn" supplies and equipment at no cost to them. Clients have been able to earn diapers, car seats, strollers, pack-n-plays, high chairs, and even cribs. We have six Baby Boutiques which are fully stocked through the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program funding as well as through the generosity of

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individuals and ministry partners throughout southwest Ohio. Our *Earn While You Learn* program is set up as a token economy in order to add dignity and the value of earning what you need for your family as important life lessons for these challenged families. More importantly, the multiple classes offered in all of our centers equip our new parents with the skills needed to become successful parents.

We believing early and accessible prenatal care is the key to reducing infant mortality. Beyond the current scope of OPP funding, ENLC offers excellent and comprehensive prenatal care on site at our Dayton location to Medicaid-eligible women. We offer wrap-around support services from our social worker who provides counseling, social services and referrals; and our perinatal nurse educator provides individualized health instruction and group education classes. Our goal is for patients to start care during the first trimester and continue care for 10 or more visits during the pregnancy in order to improve birth outcomes. We take great pride that our Prenatal Care Office has demonstrated consistently better (lower) rates of preterm deliveries and low birth weight babies as compared to Montgomery County and Ohio rates. In 2020, our Medicaid patients achieved a low birthweight rate of 4.6% compared to Ohio's rate of 8.5%, as well as preterm birth rate of 5.4% compared to Ohio's rate of 10.3%.



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I thank you for the opportunity to share the good work of Elizabeth's New Life Center in reducing infant mortality and, with OPP funding, to help low-income pregnant and parenting families succeed. I ask for the appropriation to expand funding for the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program to serve even more families in the coming years.

Rosemary Prier, Director of Operations

Elizabeth's New Life Center

With eight Women's Centers in Hamilton, Montgomery, Shelby and Warren Counties