



**TESTIMONY OF:**

Elizabeth Brown  
Executive Director  
Ohio Women's Public Policy Network

**IN OPPOSITION TO:**

Senate Bill 216  
*Parental Custody*  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
February 08, 2022

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Minority Member Thomas and distinguished members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to Senate Bill 216.

My name is Elizabeth Brown and I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network (WPPN), a coalition of nearly 40 organizations that collectively advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and their families. We believe that the measure of success for our state and communities is largely determined by the success of Ohio's women. Therefore, policymakers must advance public policies centered in equity, fairness, and justice that address the following issue areas:

- Promoting an economic security agenda for women;
- Ensuring fairness and opportunity in the workplace; and
- Improving women's health and well-being

These policy goals guide WPPN's work and shaped our interest in testifying today in opposition to Ohio's Senate Bill 216. Known as "Dylan's Law," the bill sets new restrictive and overly punitive laws for parental custody of infants who are exposed to substance use. It would take the damaging and misguided step of classifying all substance use during pregnancy as child abuse, mandating the removal of the child for a minimum of six months. Additionally, the bill would forbid the child from living at the same residence with the parent, while also making near insurmountable demands for a parent to access reunification with their child.

360 S. 3rd Street, 3rd Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215

(614)220-0150

info@innovationohio.org

Everyone, regardless of their race, class, or zip code, deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. However, our state's racist and destructive 'war on drugs' response to addiction and drug use has built a system that punishes and stigmatizes people instead of establishing a path towards health and restoration. **Legislation like Senate Bill 216 would unquestionably harm babies by subordinating infant health to the state's punitive instincts, and it would further criminalize pregnant women with substance use and addiction, rather than prioritizing their recovery and well-being.**

The changes that Senate Bill 216 makes to parental custody laws establish harmful criminalization and family separation, while creating near impossible obstacles and restrictive requirements for a mother to be reunited with her child. Supporters of the bill present it as a solution to address the addiction crisis, however, this hasty legislation fails to consider the detrimental effects it will have on mothers who may be facing substance addiction as well as on their babies whom this bill purports to care for. In fact, research has shown that the most humane and effective way to treat any consequent health issues from babies born to mothers fighting addiction is to keep the baby and mother together. Breastfeeding and physical closeness with the mother is at the heart of healthier outcomes—both physically and mentally—for the mother-child dyad.

But instead, this bill is based in the 'war on drugs' framework, a failed and misconceived effort that is rooted in racism and white supremacy, and prioritizes criminalization over recovery. There is a clear need for our state leaders to move away from overly punitive, carceral solutions to address the issues facing our communities.

As the opioid epidemic continues to ravage our communities and devastate families, it is crucial for our state to respond with community-based solutions that focus on care and recovery.

Senate Bill 216 would take us in the opposition direction, demeaning and punishing both babies and mothers facing addiction rather than focusing on solutions rooted in healthcare, treatment, and wellbeing. On behalf of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, I respectfully urge the committee to reject Senate Bill 216, and to halt action on this misguided legislation that would ultimately only cause more harm to families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions by email at [lizcbrown@gmail.com](mailto:lizcbrown@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Brown  
Executive Director  
The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network

360 S. 3rd Street, 3rd Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215  
(614)220-0150  
[info@innovationohio.org](mailto:info@innovationohio.org)