



Representative Thomas West, *49<sup>th</sup> House District*

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairwoman Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and fellow members of the House Health Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 613.

This bill aims to address infant mortality through increased screening opportunities for dangerous STDs in expecting mothers.

The bill requires that health care professionals offer HIV, syphilis, and gonorrhea tests to a woman during her first appointment related to her pregnancy, and again at the beginning of the third trimester if the woman has partaken in activities posing a risk of infection with HIV, syphilis, or gonorrhea. The health care professional is specifically required to inform the woman of her right to refuse the tests if she does not want them.

These three diseases are especially dangerous to newborns if left untreated in the mother. For example, according to the Center for Disease Control, women with untreated syphilis see a 40% death rate in infected infants<sup>1</sup>. Infants born while the mother is infected with gonorrhea have a high risk to eye infections that may lead to blindness, joint infections, and potentially deadly blood infections. We hardly need to explain the risks of an infant becoming infected with HIV.

By requiring that expecting mothers are offered testing for these STDs, we can allow healthcare professionals to address the infections before the birth. This can play an important role in reducing infant mortality, a category in which Ohio is tragically ranked among the worst states in the nation.

This legislation was brought to us by the National Coalition of STD Directors and has been implemented in a number of other states. We have worked with a number of Ohio-based healthcare organizations to craft the specific language of this bill.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-congenital-syphilis.htm>

