House Bill 40

House Health Committee

Testimony: October 29, 2019

Thank you Representative West and fellow members of the Ohio House Health Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 40. My name is Lauren Bottoms and I’m the Epidemiologist of the Cleveland Department of Public Health’s MomsFirst Project. I’ve been in the public health field for five years with a focus on health behaviors and maternal and child health.

MomsFirst, a federally funded Healthy Start Project, is one of the original 15 Healthy Start sites funded across the U.S. in 1991. The Project’s purpose is the reduction of disparities in infant mortality and poor birth outcomes experienced by African Americans in the city of Cleveland. This is accomplished by addressing the contributing factors which influence the perinatal trends in high risk communities. Contributing factors may be those that impact a pregnancy directly (prenatal care, smoking, obesity, nutrition, substance abuse, STDs/STIs, etc.) or those that may have a long term effect on a woman’s general health and the health of her children (poverty, lack of education, violence and other stressors).

MomsFirst serves woman at risk for poor pregnancy outcomes throughout their pregnancy and until the child turns 18 months. MomsFirst currently serves over 1,400 participants (79% African American, 14% Caucasian, and 7% Asian Americans and other races). Of those participants, 50% were less than 25 years old; nearly 64% had obtained a high school diploma, GED, or post-secondary education. At enrollment, over half of the participants were not working (60.8%) and had never been married (78.6%); although, nearly half had a partner. Participants range in age from 15 to 45; and many receive public assistance in the form of food, cash, or both.

MomsFirst contracts with agencies which assist low income, high risk, minority populations in Cleveland. These include three Settlement Houses which serve as multi-service neighborhood centers; the May Dugan Multi-Service Center, a community-based, social service agency that provides MomsFirst services to teens as well as women who are incarcerated, in residential substance abuse treatment facilities or living in shelters; and Northeast Ohio Neighborhood Health Services, Inc., a Federally Qualified Health Center. Every site is comprised of a Case Manager and a team of Community Health Workers who each carry a caseload of 30 participants. Community Health Workers provide case management services in the form of two face-to-face visits per month. Face-to-face visits can occur in the participant’s home, a community setting, or at the MomsFirst site location. During the visit the Community Health Worker confirms prenatal, postpartum and well child appointments, completes educational sessions (Safe Sleep, Perinatal Depression, Breastfeeding, Family Planning, STD/STIs Nutrition, Newborn Care, Smoking Cessation, Substance Abuse, and Lead Safe Living), performs screenings (Child Development (ASQ), Perinatal Depression (Edinburgh), and Smoking Cessation), and provides referral resources or linkages to ancillary support services. In 2018, over 16,000 home visits were made with participants.

MomsFirst educates women on the importance of screenings and preventative health. Reproductive health is an important focus of our program because it not only affects the woman, but the pregnancy and the infant as well. Encouraging STD/STI and HIV testing among pregnant women is a vital step in ensuring a healthy mom and healthy baby. STDs/STIs and HIV that are untreated can lead to multiple adverse health outcomes including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and infertility for mom and infection in the baby. Because many of these diseases are asymptomatic, testing before, during and after pregnancy are helpful preventative measures. Requiring that all medical providers test pregnant women for STDs/STIs and HIV not only ensures the safety of mom’s and baby’s health, but it also allows for more women to be treated when needed. MomsFirst supports our participants with free condoms and STD/STI and HIV testing through our MomsFirst Mobile Unit. We also work with mom to create a reproductive life plan to determine goals based on what she sees for her future and about whether and when to become pregnant and have (or not have) children.

The MomsFirst Project fully supports House Bill 40 and we encourage its passage to testing pregnant women for HIV, syphilis, and gonorrhea.

Respectfully,

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