



State Senator PAULA HICKS-HUDSON

Serving Ohio's 11th State Senate District

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chairman Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 355, the Minor Maternal Healthcare Act. This legislation will allow pregnant woman under the age of 18 to consent to healthcare intended to maintain and improve their well-being while supporting their pregnancy.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for pregnant teenagers to become estranged from their family if the family is unsupportive of their continuing the pregnancy. While Representative Boggs and I were initially approached by Columbus Public Health to introduce this legislation, we were surprised when advocates working with homeless youth in the area reached out to inquire how they could lend their support for the bill once it was introduced. It was shocking to learn how many homeless youth are believed to be living in Columbus, and the significant number that are also pregnant.

While Ohio law currently allows minors to seek judicial emancipation from their guardians in order to make their own medical decisions, this is an inadequate remedy for many estranged pregnant teenagers. Often, these young women are hopeful that a reconciliation with their family will occur after the baby is born, and are simply unwilling to take such legal action that could potentially worsen the relationships they are hoping to repair.

Further, too many pregnancy-related medical conditions require immediate action in order to have the best health outcomes. Although my joint sponsor, Representative Boggs, is unable to join me in testifying today, she has discussed one firsthand experience with me that is worth sharing, as it demonstrates the importance of this bill. During her pregnancy, Representative Boggs was fortunate enough to receive excellent prenatal care, and through this care, was informed that she had a mild thyroid dysfunction in her first trimester. Doctors estimate that over 60% of pregnant women experience thyroid dysfunction during the first trimester, as the baby's thyroid has yet to develop, putting extra stress on the mother's thyroid. The treatment for this condition is very simple: take a pill once a day until you are 20 weeks pregnant. However, under current law in Ohio, a pregnant minor who did not obtain parental consent would likely not receive thyroid screening, thus being unable to consent to this treatment without a guardian accompanying her to the doctor. When left untreated, thyroid dysfunction can increase the chance of having a stillborn baby and double the odds of miscarrying.

Currently, Ohio is just [one of 12 states](#) with no explicit policy on minors' authority to consent to prenatal care. The only exception for minors to receive medical treatment without parental consent in Ohio is when the care is for emergency services. This has a significant impact on the delivery care a pregnant teenager receives. In our state, a doctor cannot perform a cesarean section on a patient without parental consent until her delivery condition is deemed a "medical emergency." Because of this, mothers and their unborn children can unnecessarily be put in compromising situations.

Additionally, this law prohibits a doctor from providing a minor an epidural during delivery without parental consent. When this legislation was introduced for the first time back in 2017, we discussed the bill with a nurse who worked at a Cleveland-area hospital in the labor and delivery unit. She has helped hundreds of thousands of women deliver their children, many of whom were minors in their early teens. One such patient was a 15-year-old girl who was going through labor. She had no family and lived on the streets or between friends' houses.

As the labor progressed, the patient requested an epidural for the pain. However, her request was denied, as an epidural is considered an elective service, rather than an emergency procedure, and thus the hospital was required to obtain parental consent in order to administer it. This young woman, who was already dealing with a serious medical procedure, had to endure a needlessly painful birth simply because her family refused to support her.

While some may believe that parents have a right to be aware of and involved in their child's pregnancy, the reality is that requiring a parent to consent to prenatal and intrapartum care discourages young mothers from seeking timely and, in some cases, medically necessary care. This enormous barrier to access increases the chances of pregnancy-related risks to both the mother and infant.

This legislation will allow all pregnant minors to consent to the best delivery and prenatal care available to them and their babies. Representative Boggs and I firmly believe this is a non-partisan issue. Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to take any questions you may have.