



**Proponent Testimony HB 7
House Families and Aging Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
May 2, 2023**

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families and Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Will Kuehnle, and I am an Associate Director at the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference is the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio on matters of public policy, and we are pleased to support House Bill 7, known as the Strong Foundations Act.

The Catholic Conference thanks Representative White and Representative Humphrey for introducing HB 7, because this is precisely the kind of morally laudable, comprehensive, and prudent policy that exemplifies government ordered to the common good. Our faith teaches that government does not exist simply to maintain order, but to promote communities which enable human flourishing. Of all forms of communal life, none is more fundamental than the family. The Catholic Church looks to the family as “the primary place of humanization,” the “cradle of life and love,” and “the first natural society”. The Strong Foundations Act will support Ohio’s families, through an array of programs I will praise in a moment, so the Catholic Conference urges your support of this legislation.

Just as the family is the foundation of our society, the relationship between mother and child is the first and most intimate. This relationship is the first stone laid in the foundation of one’s life. On behalf of the Catholic Church of Ohio, we urge your support of HB 7, as this bill safeguards the mother-child relationship by assuring the health and well-being of pregnant women, preborn children, post-partum mothers, and newborn children through their first years of life. We know that women and children both before and after birth are often very vulnerable to economic distress. The Catholic Church, through Catholic Charities and programs like Walking with Moms in Need, accompanies women, children, and families and offers both solidarity and material support. However, no one element of society can bear the obligation we all share to support the disadvantaged. For this reason, the Catholic Conference is glad to support HB 7, given our moral conviction that human beings have a collective obligation to defend the vulnerable among us.

The comprehensiveness of HB 7 is another feature of this legislation that we believe will meet the needs of Ohio’s families. The Strong Foundations Act provides support for pregnant women and their children through pregnancy and continues to leverage public investments in their well-being for several years following birth. We would like to note a few provisions that stand out for their scope, breadth, and reach. Months before a child is born, the Strong Foundations Act would empower mothers to seek the help of trained doulas. By regulating doula certification – including training regarding birth disparities by race – and establishing a program through Medicaid for

reimbursement for doula services, the Strong Foundations Act will promote the well-being of pregnant women and preborn children, especially pregnant women of color. Additionally, the Strong Foundations Act's investment in the Healthy Beginnings at Home program resonates strongly with the Catholic Church's commitment to solidarity with the marginalized. The Healthy Beginnings at Home initiative's housing stabilization and wrap-around supports exemplifies collective solidarity with vulnerable families and their children before and after birth. I could also speak in praise of this legislation's many pragmatic features, including investments in technological accessibility to public programs, the expanded fatherhood programs – an especially praiseworthy component, or the expansion of childhood mental health programs. Truly, the Strong Foundations Act's expansive character is, in our view, one of its chief strengths.

Finally, the Catholic Conference recognizes the prudence of the Strong Foundations Act and urges its passage for this reason. As you heard during sponsor testimony last week, when it comes to investments made in childhood, the valuable fruit of the programs included in the Strong Foundations Act will more than justify the program's expense. According to the Catholic faith, the virtue of prudence is found in making wise decisions, which is another way of saying doing the right thing at the right time. The Strong Foundations Act is a supremely prudent piece of legislation, doing right by Ohio's struggling families at a key time in their life and the lives of mothers and children.

The Catholic Church's commitment to life in all stages of development and circumstances is well known. In HB 7, the Strong Foundations Act, we see a supremely pro-life and pro-family piece of legislation, which we are pleased to strongly support.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions.