



## SCHUBERT CENTER FOR CHILD STUDIES

Schubert Center for Child Studies  
Case Western Reserve University  
10900 Euclid Avenue  
615 Crawford Hall  
Cleveland, OH 44106-7179

Phone: 216-368-0540  
Fax: 216-368-1196  
E-mail: [schubertcenter@case.edu](mailto:schubertcenter@case.edu)  
Web: [Schubert.case.edu](http://Schubert.case.edu)

**Substitute House Bill 7 Testimony to the Ohio House of Representatives  
Families and Aging Committee  
Gabriella Celeste, Policy Director, Schubert Center for Child Studies, CWRU  
May 9, 2023 – Submitted Electronically**

Thank you Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families & Aging Committee. My name is Gabriella Celeste, and I am the Policy Director of the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University, and an Interested Party on Substitute House Bill 7 (“Sub-HB 7”), the “Strong Foundations Act.”

The Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University works to bridge research, education, policy, and practice for the well-being of children and families. It is in this capacity -- recognizing that babies and children do best when their parents are well, capable of supporting their families, and living in safe and stable housing – that we encourage efforts to support children and parents through the kinds of investments included in Sub-HB 7. We applaud Representatives White and Humphrey for their leadership in sponsoring this comprehensive legislation to ensure all of our youngest ones have a chance to thrive.

Despite some progress, Ohio’s infant mortality rate is 6.7, compared to the U.S. rate of 5.4, [putting Ohio in the top 10 states with the highest rates of infant mortality](#). Ohio’s Black babies are 2.7 times more likely to die before their first birthday, with a 13.6 mortality rate, than white babies.<sup>1</sup> Concerningly, the maternal mortality rate is the highest it’s been since 1965;<sup>2</sup> in Ohio, the maternal mortality is 23.8, slightly higher than the overall U.S. rate of 23.5.<sup>3</sup> Among Black women the mortality rate is 2.6 times as much as the rate for white women. Ohio is also in the top 5 states with the most reported victims of child abuse, with babies and children under 5 years of age being the most at risk of abuse and neglect.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this committee has heard ample prior testimony on these data and other stark realities facing too many of Ohio’s pregnant women, babies and young children, and how these can lead to significant impacts throughout the life course, including developmental delays, learning difficulties, behavioral issues, health challenges and other issues. The Strong Foundations Act faces these realities head on by presenting a collective investment in best practices that have proven results to tackling many of these pressing challenges.

With funding for effective peer-based interventions like Centering Pregnancy and trained doula care, Sub-HB 7 fosters pregnant women’s physical and mental health as

the critical foundation for a newborn's livelihood and future prospects. In northeast Ohio, we've seen the positive impact of these models, through programs like Birthing Beautiful Communities and other interventions supported by First Year Cleveland that could benefit from this Act.

The Strong Foundations Act recognizes the primary role parents play in healthy child development and includes investments to further strengthen those vital connections and help to ensure babies can grow in a safe home. Not having safe and stable housing is a major stressor on pregnant women and their young children and undermines their health. To tackle this, the Act includes supporting the innovative Healthy Beginnings at Home program that was piloted by CelebrateOne in Columbus, Ohio with very promising results.<sup>5</sup> Ohio's Help Me Grow and Nurse Family Partnership home visiting programs, which provide parent education and supports, developmental screenings and links to early intervention services, are included in Sub-HB 7, as well as proven-effective parenting programs like Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and programs tailored specifically for fathers. In addition to supporting parents' mental wellness, resources for early childhood mental health counselors and consultations also helps to equip parents to manage challenging behaviors in their little ones.

The Strong Foundations Act rightly focuses on the early years in child development, during those formative years where the most significant brain growth occurs, laying the groundwork for a child's healthy growth and future success. This includes provisions to ensure quality childcare and prioritize families that experience poverty, including those in rural and Appalachian communities. Sub-HB 7 also employs strategies to increase parent and child access to care by addressing hurdles like transportation and enrollment barriers, ensuring continuous Medicaid coverage from birth through age three, and reducing delays in care for premature infants by making them automatically eligible for Part C Early Intervention services and supports.

Taken as a whole, the Strong Foundations Act prioritizes public investments to ensure Ohio's pregnant women and babies can start on solid ground in order to grow toward a healthy and successful future. The data on return on investments in early health and childhood yielding long term results is abundantly clear<sup>6</sup> making all Ohioans beneficiaries of the state's commitment to healthy families.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on these important matters. Please contact me at [mgc36@case.edu](mailto:mgc36@case.edu) should you have any questions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ohio Department of Health. Infant Mortality Annual Report (2020). Access at: <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/infant-vitality/infant-vitality>

<sup>2</sup> Toy, S. "U.S. Maternal Mortality Hits Highest Level Since 1965. Black mothers are most affected, 2021 data show." Wall Street Journal (March 16, 2023) Accessed at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-maternal-mortality-hits-highest-level-since-1965-f9829776#>

<sup>3</sup> Hoyert DL. "Maternal Mortality Rates in the U.S., 2021. NCHS Health E-Stats." (2023) Accessed at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.htm#:~:text=Rates%20in%202021%20were%200.4,for%20women%20under%20age%2025>.

<sup>4</sup> Statista Research Dept. "Child abuse in the U.S. - reported victims 2021, by state." (Feb. 21, 2023) Accessed at:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/203841/number-of-child-abuse-cases-in-the-us-by-state/>

<sup>5</sup> Health Policy Institute of Ohio. "Healthy Beginnings at Home 1.0 Evaluation report (July 6, 2021). Accessed at:

<https://www.healthpolicyohio.org/healthy-beginnings-at-home-final-report/>

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Guevara, H. "Examining the Significant Return on Investment from High-Quality Early Learning & Care." First Five Years Fund (Jan. 6, 2022) Accessed at: <https://www.ffyf.org/examining-the-significant-return-on-investment-from-high-quality-early-learning-care/>