



## **Testimony on House Bill 7 before Ohio House Families and Aging Committee**

**Hannah Halbert, Executive Director**

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chairwoman Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families and Aging Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 7, the Strong Foundations Act, on behalf of Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit research institute with the mission of making a more vibrant, equitable, inclusive and sustainable Ohio.

More than 460,000 Ohio children lived in poverty in 2021. Four of the 10 most common jobs in our state don't pay enough to feed a family of three without food assistance. Ongoing inflation is making it harder for parents to afford groceries, child care, and heat for their homes.

Compared to their more economically secure peers, children who are hungry or who grow up in poverty are more likely to do worse in school, have health problems or behavioral issues, and get involved with the criminal legal system as adults. On the other hand, when kids have economic stability and enough to eat, they are healthier and do better at school.

Things are getting worse for many of our neighbors. An estimated 673,000 households in Ohio have fewer resources to keep food on the table as of March of this year and 220,000 Ohioans are at risk of losing health coverage over the next year.

We support the measures outlined in House Bill 7, and know that this legislation, if passed, would expand opportunity for and increase the economic and health outcomes of children in families with low incomes.

### **WIC**

Parents in Ohio are still required to go to a local office every month to have benefits from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) added to their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. Most other states automatically load WIC benefits onto participants' EBT cards each month. In 2023, people don't have to take a bus or drive to their bank every time they need more cash. WIC participants shouldn't have to make that trip either. State lawmakers can save families some time and

make life a little easier by bringing the system online and making it more modern and efficient.

This legislation creates a much-needed path to modernization for the enrollment and benefit distribution processes. The feasibility study required by H.B. 7 should also consider ways to include input from people using the WIC program, so that the changes, language and the possible electronic or virtual interface are accessible and built to encourage benefit delivery. WIC can literally save lives. It has been shown to [reduce infant mortality](#), especially among Black children.

### **Doulas**

H.B. 7 would enable Medicaid to cover doula services for pregnant women and new moms on Medicaid. Extending coverage for birthing services like doulas ensures culturally appropriate care for Black and brown pregnant women, who experience high rates of discrimination in traditional birthing environments. Extending Medicaid coverage to doula services is a step toward better outcomes for moms and babies. Notably, expanding this service to Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to cover women who are pregnant while incarcerated also has potential to improve future outcomes for mom and baby. The [Minnesota Prison Doula Project](#) is a model of what is possible through doula support and care. The program provides doula care, along with group education, counseling, and supportive visitation and transition care when clients return to their communities. The improvements in Medicaid coverage in this legislation can help Ohioans start building a better network of care for all moms.

### **Continuous Medicaid**

H.B. 7 would provide more health coverage for children on Medicaid. It includes continuous Medicaid coverage, which would ensure Ohio babies and infants who qualify for Medicaid get health care continuously for 48 months or until the date the child exceeds age 4. This will provide families with health coverage for doctor visits for the first three years of their child's life without the stress of incurring major costs for critical health care services.

H.B. 7 provides Ohio's families and children with greater economic stability and a better chance at a healthy life. We encourage your support of the bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

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