



LYNANNE GUTIERREZ

Policy Director & Legal Counsel

lwolfg@groundworkohio.org

mobile: 614-204-6106

172 E. State Street, Suite 400

Columbus, Ohio 43215

**Ohio Senate
Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
Senate Bill 151
Lynanne Gutierrez
Groundwork Ohio
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Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the committee, my name is Lynanne Gutierrez and I am the Policy Director and Legal Counsel at Groundwork Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony on Senate Bill 151 which would designate the month of May as “Maternal Mortality Awareness Month.”

As you may know, Groundwork is a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization that champions high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five, that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families and communities. Our vision is to make Ohio the best place to be a young child so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Groundwork is led by Executive Director, Shannon Jones, and governed by a robust steering committee of child-focused health and education experts from across the state.

Groundwork is testifying today as a proponent of Senate Bill 151 because healthy children begin with healthy moms. Too often mothers do not receive the quality care they deserve and need before, during and after their pregnancy. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that every year in the United States, an estimated 700-900 women die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes and some 65,000 nearly die. The U.S. has the worst maternal death record in the developed world. African American women are three times more likely than white women to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. A national study found that of the medical complications that most commonly cause maternal mortality and morbidity, black women were two to three times more likely to die than white women who have the same exact complications. The reasons behind the racial disparity are many and complex but lack of access and poor quality of care are leading factors.

Unfortunately, while Ohio’s overall maternal mortality rates are marginally lower than the national average, it is trending up. Ohio’s maternal mortality rate is 20.3 deaths per 100,000 births. Black Ohio mothers, however, are dying at nearly three times the rate of white moms at 46 per 100,000 births. This is a crisis and maternal mortality rates are on the rise. Over half of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable and our state must take action to ensure that moms and their families are safe and supported. It is our hope that of this legislation is a recognition that state policymakers will increase investments in and develop better practices and policies to prevent maternal mortality and morbidity. Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding my testimony.