



**Commission on Infant Mortality Subcommittee  
Ohio Department of Job  
and Family Services Testimony  
Cynthia C. Dungey, Director  
April 28, 2016**

Chairwoman Jones, Chairwoman Kunze and members of the Commission on Infant Mortality Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. Much of the work we're doing at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to reduce poverty parallels the work of the Commission on Infant Mortality, in that we're taking a holistic approach to improving the lives of Ohioans through access to both employment and vital services. I appreciate the opportunity to describe this work today.

As director of ODJFS, I am responsible for managing a number of vital programs that directly affect the lives of Ohioans who rely on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, job training and employment services, child care, unemployment insurance, child welfare and adoption, adult protective services, and child support programs. Our mission is to improve the well-being of Ohio's workforce and families by ensuring the safety of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens and promoting long-term self-sufficiency.

**TANF**

Accountability and personal responsibility are important cornerstones of the TANF program and fully embraced by Ohio. In recent years, the state has worked diligently to improve our work participation rate and provide job training and work experiences to adults receiving cash assistance. Ohio has increased investments in work support programs, including expanding access to child care assistance for families with incomes up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

We've worked within the rubric of the current system, but simply meeting the work participation rate isn't indicative of actually getting people jobs or the education they need to be successful in the workforce. The next crucial step is ensuring that TANF recipients overcome barriers to employment and develop the in-demand skills local employers seek.

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### **Employment and CCMEP**

Instead of continuing to focus on arbitrary work participation rates and TANF activities, we've developed a new way to work, with the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program, or CCMEP. CCMEP will end Ohio's siloed approach to treating the symptoms of poverty. Instead, we will seek a cure for the underlying challenges faced by low-income Ohioans, starting first with 16- to 24-year-olds, where early intervention can have the greatest impact. CCMEP will integrate funding from both TANF and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act so caseworkers can offer more coordinated, individualized help to those with barriers to employment, many of whom are pregnant or parenting.

Last summer, we requested a waiver from federal work participation restrictions on the number of months allowed for education in order to more successfully help our customers gain the skills they need for long-term self-sufficiency. Instead of going through activities in order to meet a requirement, we want to address the underlying challenges and needs that will allow them to be successful in the workforce.

As we do this, we will continue our commitment to providing services in a way that is respectful of and responsive to our customers' cultural and linguistic needs. This is an important part of the curriculum being developed for CCMEP caseworkers, and it is based on national standards.

### **Other Initiatives**

In addition, we have several other initiatives under way that work congruently with the goals of the Commission on Infant Mortality.

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood is housed within our agency. The commission is dedicated to improving the well-being of Ohio's children by helping fathers become better parents, partners and providers. In October, we learned that over the next five years Ohio will receive \$10 million to help new and expectant low-income fathers ages 16 to 24 become more effective, nurturing parents. This grant, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will fund the "New Beginnings for New Fathers" program in Franklin, Clark, Cuyahoga, Hamilton and Montgomery counties.

Participating fathers will receive job training, parenting classes, and healthy marriage and relationship education. We expect it to help reduce infant mortality in Ohio by educating fathers about the importance of such things as not smoking, safe sleep environments and other health concerns. This will be in addition to the eight existing fatherhood initiatives already in place around the state.

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund also is housed within JFS. The trust fund is the state's sole, dedicated public funding source for child abuse and neglect prevention. It supports prevention programs that recognize and build on existing strengths within families, including programs that educate parents about infant and child safety.

Both last year and this year, the trust fund supported two evidence-based home visiting programs: Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers. It also continues to fund mom-

to-mom peer support groups, which help women and their families receive positive support for a healthy pregnancy and beyond.

JFS has many collaborations under way with other entities, as well. For example, we're partnering with the Ohio Department of Health in planning ways to use Ohio's federal Maternal and Child Health Block Grant to reduce infant mortality.

Our employees are active in the Ohio Collaborative to Prevent Infant Mortality, or OCPIM. Three serve on the Fatherhood and Social Determinants subcommittees. Two serve on the OCPIM leadership team and the 2016 Ohio Infant Mortality Summit planning committee.

We're planning training sessions for Ohio's community health workers on how they can connect their customers to local JFS safety net and employment services.

We also partnered last year with the Ohio departments of Health and Youth Services to present eight regional trauma trainings for front-line caregivers and staff at juvenile justice facilities. These trainings were offered free of charge to facilitators of the Personal Responsibility and Education Program, or PREP, as well as child welfare staff and foster parents affiliated with PREP provider agencies. Biological parents also were allowed to attend with agency approval.

As you may know, PREP is a national adolescent pregnancy prevention effort.

So you can see that much of our work at JFS parallels the work of the Commission on Infant Mortality. Like the commission, we understand the importance of taking a holistic approach to improving the lives of Ohioans. By reducing poverty and improving access to employment and other vital services, and through the work of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, the Ohio Children's Trust Fund and our multiple collaborations, I'm sure you can see that we share your goals.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I'll now be happy to answer any questions.

