

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**COMMISSIONERS ACCEPT INFANT MORTALITY REPORT, AFFIRM COMMITMENT
TO PROTECTING FRANKLIN COUNTY'S YOUNGEST RESIDENTS**

During last Tuesday's meeting of the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, the Commissioners accepted the final report and recommendations of the Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force, and voted to solidify the county's commitment to protect its youngest residents by enacting the recommendations set forth in the Task Force's report. Commissioner John O'Grady and Franklin County Job and Family Services Director, Anthony Trotman, both served on the Task Force, and Trotman will continue to serve on the executive committee tasked with furthering research and the Task Force's intervention plan. The Commissioners will oversee, with the City of Columbus, the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations, and lead several of the implementation strategies.

"Franklin County babies and their families deserve the very best chance at life, but our infant mortality rate is far too high," said Commission President Marilyn Brown. "Worse yet, the infant mortality rate for black children is twice that of white children, and we are committed to closing that gap and bringing the infant mortality rate down."

The Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force was formed in late 2013 by Columbus City Council President Andrew Ginther in partnership with the Franklin County Commissioners, Columbus Public Health, and Nationwide Children's Hospital. President Ginther and Public Health Commissioner Dr. Teresa Long were on hand during Tuesday's meeting to highlight the report's findings and recommendations.

"Each week in our community, approximately three families face the unimaginable heartache of losing a child," said City Council President Andrew Ginther. "With the medical expertise and social services at our disposal, it is unacceptable and inconsistent with our values that as our city and county grow, so too does the rate of children dying before their first birthday. We have the ability and are making a commitment to ensure that all children in Central Ohio can thrive."

In 2011, the infant mortality rate for Franklin County was 9.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, 71st among Ohio's 88 counties, and comparable to the national rate the early 1900s. The infant mortality rate for African American babies in Central Ohio is more than twice that of white babies, and the difference between the two has grown in recent decades.

"Good health is more than just healthcare," said Columbus Public Health Commissioner Dr. Teresa Long. "There are great resources in Central Ohio for families, but they are not equally distributed or equally utilized. It is unacceptable that our infant mortality rate is as high as it is or that such a racial disparity still exists."

For six months, the Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force has extensively studied the causes of infant mortality and evidence on what works to bring the rate down, and has worked with experts in the field and community leaders alike to develop a plan to address the issue in Central Ohio. The leading causes of infant mortality are being born prematurely, congenital anomalies, sleep-related infant deaths, and maternal complications of pregnancy, and racial disparities exist for all those causes of infant deaths. Among the Task Force's findings are that high infant mortality in Central Ohio and persistent disparities are largely affected by the unjust distribution of conditions that support health.

"Every infant's death is a tragedy. Years ago, when I was a young child, our family endured unimaginable loss. Experiencing that first-hand left me resolved to help others avoid such heartache," Commissioner Paula Brooks said. "Since 2009, Franklin County has worked with both Nationwide Children's Hospital and the federally-qualified health clinics, and has committed to provide more than \$10 million in funding for better birth outcomes, reduction of prematurity, and availability of prenatal care for our most vulnerable population. Joining with the City of Columbus, on a strategic focus in 'hot spot' neighborhoods to address the disparate pattern of infant mortality, gives more hope that all our children will thrive and reach their first birthdays, along with many more."

In addition to working with medical and public health experts, the Task Force engaged the Central Ohio community through workshops and other outreach to stakeholders such as health care providers, educators, social service agencies, black faith leaders, neighborhood leaders from high-risk areas, and expectant and new mothers. The Task Force's recommendations and first-year strategies recognize that healthy babies require healthy families and communities that provide an opportunity for all residents to succeed. Included among the Task Force's eight recommendations are plans to:

- Reduce social and economic disparities across the community and in the highest-risk neighborhoods.
- Improve women's health in general and prior to their becoming pregnant.
- Improve family planning resources and access to long-acting reversible contraception.
- Improve pre-natal and preventative care for expectant mothers.
- Promoting infant safe sleep through education and outreach throughout the community on the best, safest way to put young children to bed.

"Franklin County is a fantastic place to grow up," said Commissioner John O'Grady. "And we need to make sure that every baby in our community has the chance to do just that. The overall infant mortality rate in our community is unacceptable and the rate among black babies is heartbreaking. We are committed to reducing the overall rate by 40 percent and cutting the differences between the infant mortality rates for black and white babies in half."

Among other commitments, the resolution the commissioners voted to accept today lays out plans for the county Department of Job and Family Services to increase enrollment in public and private health insurance coverage, preventing teen pregnancy, and producing a multimedia campaign that provides important health information to young people and their families.

The full report of the Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force can be downloaded [here](#).

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