



JOHN R. KASICH

GOVERNOR • STATE OF OHIO

Communication Department

July 23, 2015

Laura Jones, (614) 420-6946, Laura.Jones@governor.ohio.gov

Erika Clark Jones, CelebrateOne, (614) 645-0817, ECJones@columbus.gov

OHIO'S FIRST LADY HOSTS FIRST LADIES SUMMIT ON INFANT MORTALITY *State, City of Columbus collaborate on issue with women from the faith community*

COLUMBUS – In an effort to address the serious issue of infant mortality in Ohio, women from Columbus' faith-based community participated in the "Columbus-area First Ladies Summit: Working Together to CelebrateOne." First Lady Karen W. Kasich, Columbus Health Commissioner Dr. Teresa C. Long, and [CelebrateOne](#) Program Director Liane Egle hosted the summit at the Columbus Foundation earlier this week.



The audience of primarily first ladies (wives of pastors from area churches) as well as pastors and other church leaders, received an overview on Ohio's infant mortality issue, shared what they considered to be contributing factors to infant deaths in their communities, and had the opportunity to ask questions of a panel of experts.

In her opening remarks, Mrs. Kasich said, "We're here today to forge partnerships and grow relationships with a goal of helping every baby celebrate their first birthday. By leveraging our leadership roles as women of faith we can be the catalysts for turning the tide on this unacceptable loss of Ohio's most precious natural resource, our children."

Infant mortality is defined as the death of a child before his or her first birthday. Ohio has one of the worst infant mortality rates in the country and Columbus has one of the highest rates among the state's major cities, according to the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). The three leading causes for those deaths in Ohio are prematurity/pre-term births, sleep-related deaths, and birth defects.

Columbus officials convened a task force in 2014 to identify strategies to combat the city's high rate of infant deaths. CelebrateOne is the collective impact initiative responsible for implementing the recommendations of the task force. The effort includes comprehensive grass root strategies in eight high-priority Columbus neighborhoods where infant deaths occur at a higher rate.

"Women of faith are respected and trusted leaders who play a crucial role in their congregations and their neighborhoods," said Dr. Long. "Their support and commitment to reaching out to pregnant women, moms and families is an essential component in our efforts to help babies reach their first birthdays and thrive each year beyond that."

Mrs. Patricia Ross, first lady of Triedstone Baptist Church and Mrs. Frieda Gilyard, first lady of Shiloh Baptist Church, offered opening and closing prayers. Pastor Marisol Fernandez of Fountain of Salvation provided the afternoon blessing.

Summit attendees also heard from Dr. Arthur R. James, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center; Andrew Ginther, Columbus City Council President; and ODH Director Rick Hodges, Ohio Department of Health. Keynote speakers for the day included Dr. Patricia Gabbe, pediatrician and founder of Moms2B; Twinkle Schottke, co-director of Moms2B; and Barbara Lynch, co-chair of the Cincinnati First Ladies Health Initiative and first lady of New Jerusalem Baptist Church in Cincinnati.

“I am grateful to be a part of this team as we endeavor to assure that every baby celebrates his or her first birthday,” said Mrs. Gilyard. “Dr. Martin Luther King stated that: ‘Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.’ I applaud the committee, First Lady Kasich, and CelebrateOne for breaking the silence and for the commitment to reduce infant mortality.

The summit included an interactive survey in which attendees helped to clarify the needs of families expecting a child or who have experienced a loss. Additionally, participants helped to determine the resource and training needs of congregations that would support productive partnerships with CelebrateOne to reduce infant mortality.

With a first ladies committee established, next steps discussed included bringing additional area churches and faith-based organizations into the initiative. To assist with this effort, summit attendees received a toolkit with a variety of materials they can use to educate and address the infant mortality issue with their congregants.

Learn more about Ohio First Lady Karen W. Kasich and her initiatives, including children’s wellness and women’s heart health at firstlady.ohio.gov

