

NEWS RELEASE

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First Year Cleveland Announces New Community-Led Executive Committee

CLEVELAND, OH – First Year Cleveland (FYC), a public-private partnership aimed at reducing infant mortality and eliminating racial inequities in infant health outcomes, announced the appointment of members to its reconstituted Executive Committee. Installing the new committee will catalyze FYC’s shift in strategic direction to focus on combating racism as a root cause of maternal and infant mortality. Change in the initiative’s governance will be an essential guiding force for FYC’s evolution and a pivotal step to infuse considerations of equity and racial justice throughout its activities.

Expanding from 17 to 20 members, the Committee will lead FYC’s health care delivery and community-driven model of impact to include support for upstream and community-based initiatives that promote prenatal and infant health. The Committee will maintain representation from public and private sectors—including City and County government, health care institutions, and philanthropy—while broadening its decision-making to include Black leaders of nonprofit organizations that promote community health, grassroots organizers, faith-based leaders, social service executives, and policy experts.

The Executive Committee is responsible for the strategic direction and fiscal oversight. Committee members were selected based on their experiences and relationship to issues related to infant mortality and racial equity, including: direct experience with pregnancy and infant loss; unique ability to advance FYC’s goals and objectives; willingness to collaborate and embrace the goals and approach of FYC in its next iteration; reflection of the community FYC serves; and willingness to actively participate in and contribute to the leadership of FYC. The majority of Executive Committee members are Black, in line with a charge from the founding FYC Executive Committee, to ensure that the communities most impacted by the underlying causes of poor birth outcomes—such as racism and toxic stress—drive the initiative’s decision-making.

New Executive Committee Co-Chairs:

- **Blaine Griffin**, Cleveland City Council Member, Ward 6, City of Cleveland
- **India Pierce Lee**, Senior Vice President, Program, Cleveland Foundation

New Executive Committee Members:

- **John Corlett**, President and Executive Director, The Center for Community Solutions

- **Juan Molina Crespo**, Community Advocate and Consultant
- **Kimberly Green, MSN**, Director of Nursing, Women and Children and Rehabilitation Service, The MetroHealth System
- **Iris Harvey**, President and CEO, Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio
- **Toni Jones**, Senior Director, Enterprise Life Services, CareSource
- **Rev. Frederick Knuckles**, Pastor, New Fellowship Baptist Church and Program Manager of Healthy Fathers Initiatives, University Settlement
- **Frances Mills**, Public Health Commissioner, Cleveland Department of Public Health
- **Margaret Mitchell**, President and CEO, YWCA Greater Cleveland
- **Jeffery Patterson**, Chief Executive Officer, Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority
- **Sabrina Roberts**, Administrator of Health Policy and Programs, Cuyahoga County Department of Health and Human Services
- **Amy Stephens, MD**, Chair, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Cleveland Clinic Fairview Hospital
- **June Taylor**, Chief of Human Resources, Training and PMQI, Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging

Returning Executive Committee Members:

- **Terry Allan**, Commissioner, Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **Mitchell Balk**, President, The Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation
- **Celina Cunanan, CNM**, Division Chief, Nurse Midwifery and Interim Director, Center for Excellence, Diversity and Inclusion, University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center
- **Marcia Egbert**, Program Director, Thriving Families and Social Justice, The George Gund Foundation
- **Michael W. Konstan, MD**, Vice Dean for Translational Research, Director of Community Health Programs, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
- **Jazmin Long**, Chief Executive Officer, Birthing Beautiful Communities

For more than five decades, Cuyahoga County has had one of the highest infant death rates in the country. Cleveland has also ranked among the worst cities for preterm births, the primary driver of infant mortality. These startling facts spurred the launch of FYC in 2015 with a mission to mobilize the community through a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths and close racial gaps by 2025. Since then, countywide infant mortality has dropped by nearly 28 percent.

The founding FYC Executive Committee has unanimously agreed to expand efforts to decrease Black, non-Hispanic infant mortality by focusing on a health care delivery and community-driven model of impact, including a targeted focus on Black expectant mothers and the prenatal period. The new Executive Committee will be responsible for effectuating this approach and devising new strategies to advance health equity.

“The appointment of new Executive Committee members marks an important milestone for First Year Cleveland,” said Mitchell Balk, President of The Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation and Chair of the FYC Governance Committee. The Governance Committee was charged with appointing the new Executive

Committee members through a community-wide search and public nomination process. “This group brings to the table a remarkable depth and breadth of leadership, a diversity of experiences, and a commitment to addressing racism, toxic stress experienced by Black people, and other upstream factors that contribute to infant mortality in our community.”

“It has been an honor to serve as Co-Chair of First Year Cleveland over the past three years. I cannot think of a group of people that is better equipped to build on our successes to-date and take our impact to the next level,” commented Akram Boutros, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer of The MetroHealth System who serves as outgoing Co-Chair of the FYC Executive Committee alongside Patti DePompei, RN, MSN, President of University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children’s and MacDonald Women’s hospitals. “MetroHealth remains a committed partner in the fight against infant mortality and health inequities. We will work with First Year Cleveland every step of the way to address this issue once and for all.”

India Pierce Lee, Senior Vice President, Program at the Cleveland Foundation will serve as incoming Co-Chair of the FYC Executive Committee. “First Year Cleveland has helped rally the community around one of the most critical issues of our time,” she said. “Now, we need to double-down on commitments made to inclusion and anti-racism and make sure they translate to action. No one expects the path forward to be easy, but our babies’ lives depend on it. We are in this for the long haul.”

Central to the Executive Committee’s charge is learning from and integrating the experiences of community members directly impacted by extreme preterm birth (babies born before 28 weeks of pregnancy), infant death, and bias in maternal care. Heightened engagement of neighborhood residents and elevating the voices of women and families who experience racism and infant loss will be key to FYC’s continued progress.

“There is so much more to be done, and we have the right people in place to do it,” remarked Jazmin Long, Chief Executive Officer of Birthing Beautiful Communities and member of the FYC Executive and Governance Committees. “The Governance Committee’s appointment process is an outgrowth of the FYC Design Team and the work of so many committed partners, including Birthing Beautiful Communities. We stand ready to support First Year Cleveland’s new strategic approach and making good on its commitment to Black moms and babies in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County.”

The Executive Committee will assume leadership beginning in fall 2021

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About First Year Cleveland: First Year Cleveland mobilizes the community through partnerships and a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths and racial disparities. To fulfill its mission and vision, FYC creates a common understanding of our county’s infant mortality problem and leading the development and coordination of strategies to solve it, focusing on three priority areas: reducing racial disparities, addressing extreme prematurity, and eliminating sleep-related deaths. First Year Cleveland is a program at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Financial support is provided by Ohio Department of Medicaid, Ohio Department of Health, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Ohio Equity Institute, Cuyahoga County, City of Cleveland, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, The Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation, and The George Gund Foundation. Learn more at firstyearcleveland.org.