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KASICH LAUNCHES NEW EFFORT TO COMBAT INFANT MORTALITY

Also Signs HB 465, Establishing Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Awareness Week

COLUMBUS – Calling it unacceptable that more than 1,000 Ohio babies die each year before their first birthday, Governor John R. Kasich today announced new efforts to combat infant mortality before 1,500 leaders from across Ohio attending the *2014 Ohio Infant Mortality Summit*. The goal of the summit, first hosted last year by the Ohio Department of Health, is to help foster statewide efforts to ensure that every Ohio baby is born healthy, full-term, and lives to celebrate their first birthday.

“Ohio has one of the worst infant mortality rates in the nation and that is simply unacceptable,” Kasich told the audience. “Initiatives like today’s summit and our efforts to reduce drug addiction are good first steps, but we must work together to focus support and resources to those mothers and babies most at-risk.”

Ohio’s 2011 infant mortality rate was 7.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 6.1 nationally. While the issue impacts Ohio families of various races and locations, the African American infant mortality rate is particularly troubling at 15.5 deaths per 1,000 live births—more than twice the white rate of 6.4 per 1,000 live births.

New efforts announced today by Kasich to better combat the problem include:

- Identifying Areas With the Greatest Need: The Ohio Department of Health has identified “hot spot” communities where infant mortality is the highest in the state;
- Bringing New Care Strategies to At-Risk Moms: The Ohio Medicaid program will direct the managed health care organizations serving Medicaid recipients to automatically connect pregnant women and babies in the hot spot communities with high-risk care management benefits; and
- Connecting At-Risk Moms with Care: The Office of Health Transformation will work to identify and fund research based best-practice methods of group care for expecting mothers in both targeted urban and rural communities.

These new strategies are in addition to new funding to research Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and the new \$4.2 million Maternal Opiate Medical Support (M.O.M.S.) initiative to help expecting mothers break addiction.

After his announcement, Kasich signed House Bill 465 (Johnson & McDermott), a new law designating the first week of July as “Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Awareness Week.” NAS is a complex disorder that occurs when newborns are exposed to certain addictive opiate or narcotic drugs. Conditions associated with NAS include low birth weight, respiratory complications and feeding difficulties which may contribute to infant deaths in some cases.

