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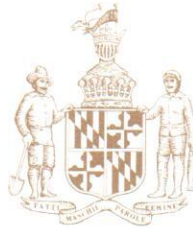Prince George's and
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House Bill 837 - Public Health - Maternal Mortality and Morbidity – Implicit Bias Training and Study

House Health and Government Operations Committee

SPONSOR TESTIMONY: Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk (SUPPORT, as amended)

Chairman Pendergrass, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, I am pleased to present House Bill (HB) 837.

After more than 50 years of steady decline, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in the U.S. has begun a significant upward trend. This is thought to be due, in part, to the increase in chronic health conditions such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and heart ailments. The Maryland MMR has been consistently higher than the national average. For 2012-2016, our rate was more than double the Healthy People 2020 Objective.

An analysis of the trends in the Maryland MMR shows that while the MMR for Caucasian women has decreased over 10 years, the rate for African American women increased by more than 20% from 2007 through 2016. The Maryland Department of Health reported in 2018 that African American women had a Mortality Rate (MMR) 2.4 times greater than Caucasian women.

HB 837 will modify the existing Cultural and Linguistic Health Care Professional Competency Program. The implicit bias program component will be created for all health care providers involved in the perinatal care of patients in a perinatal care facility. Training will center around identifying and reducing implicit bias and its effects on care delivery, maternal mortality and maternal morbidity. Passing this legislation is expected to decrease risk from harm to women of color caused by poor health care provider decisions. Training will be periodically refreshed. The bill also requires a study by the Maryland Maternal Mortality Review Program, in consultation with others, and has been amended to add the Maryland Maternal health Innovation Program.

Maryland is a proud leader in health care on many fronts. It's time we catch up with other states and close the MMR disparities between women of color and Caucasian women. Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 837. I respectfully request your favorable vote.