

HB 837 – Public Health – Maternal Mortality and Morbidity – Implicit Bias Training and Study

Position: *Support*

Bill Summary

HB 837 would require health care professionals involved in the perinatal care of patients in hospitals and freestanding birthing centers to complete implicit bias training every two years. The bill defines “implicit bias” as:

A bias in judgment that results from subtle cognitive processes, including the following prejudices and stereotypes that often operate at a level below conscious awareness and without intentional control:

- Prejudicial negative feelings or beliefs about a group that an individual holds without being aware of the feelings or beliefs; and
- Unconscious attributions of particular qualities to a member of a specific social group that are influenced by experience and base on learned associations between various qualities and social categories, including race and gender.

The Cultural and Linguistic Health Care Professional Competency Program is charged with establishing and providing the evidenced-based implicit bias training program.

MedStar Health’s Position

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of reported pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. steadily increased from 7.2 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1987 to 17.2 deaths per 100,000 births in 2015. More American women are dying of pregnancy-related complications than in any other developed country. The reasons are unclear, but increases in maternal age, pre-pregnancy obesity, poverty, untreated pre-existing chronic medical conditions, the high number of cesareans, and a lack of access to health care all are likely factors contributing to the upswing in maternal deaths. And, deaths are not the only concern. For every maternal death in the United States, as many as 70 to 100 women experience severe maternal morbidity, or “near misses.”

Implicit bias is one of the factors that drives such health disparities in maternal care. MedStar Health supports efforts to mitigate the effect of implicit bias in all interactions and at all points of contact with our perinatal patients. This is important because implicit bias has the potential to impact not only outcomes of care, but also whether patients will return for services or even seek care at the organization in the first place. While a majority of research on implicit bias in health care focuses on racism, other social factors such as primary spoken language, gender, sexual orientation, education, and employment status are also associated with implicit bias and differences in communication and treatment.

For the above reasons, MedStar Health urges a FAVORABLE report on HB 837.