



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

March 14, 2024

COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee

BILL: SB 1059 – Maternal Health – Assessments, Referrals and Reporting (Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024)

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

The Foundation is pleased to support SB 1059 – Maternal Health – Assessments, Referrals and Reporting (Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024). This bill would require providers to complete a prenatal risk assessment for their pregnant patients, provide resources to birthing parents following a high-risk pregnancy and report data to local health departments. It would also require the state to study and report on the causes of maternal and infant mortality.

Our current health care system is built upon long-standing structural inequities that we have yet to solve. Many Marylanders of color lack access to quality health care and often contend with bias, prejudice and discrimination when dealing with providers that lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment and lower-value or suboptimal care. Often, particularly for Black women, this leads to maternal and infant mortality and a failure to receive respectful maternity care.

In 2019, Black mothers living in Howard County were 63% more likely to have an infant born premature and 54% more likely to have an infant with low birth weight than white mothers – key factors that contribute to infant death.ⁱ In the same year, almost 12% of Hispanic mothers and 8% of Black mothers in the county received late or no prenatal care – in the case of Hispanic mothers, that’s more than four times the percentage of White mothers.ⁱⁱ Nationally, Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than White women.ⁱⁱⁱ SB 1059 seeks to address these disparities by improving screening and coordination of care for birthing people in our state.

Over the past several years, the Foundation has been a key partner in the Howard County Health Justice Coalition to demand better policies and programs to improve maternal and

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infant health. In addition to advocating for the Healthy Babies Equity Act at the state level, we are working to implement a full continuum of reproductive health services through the county's Maternity Partnership Program that expands access to prenatal and wraparound postpartum services to new mothers for up to one year after giving birth. The Maryland Maternal Health Act is an important complement to this work that would better screen and connect patients with community-based services, helping us move the needle to improve health outcomes for all birthing people and their children in our state.

For this reason, the Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 1059 and urges a FAVORABLE report.**

Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Maryland Vital Records, 2019.

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ⁱⁱⁱ The Network for Public Health Law, 2023.