

I am here today voting in favor of the Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024 which requires healthcare providers to offer prenatal risk assessment forms during a patient's initial prenatal visit and the third trimester visit as well as postpartum infant and maternal referral forms following high-risk pregnancies. I do believe that these assessments should be offered to all women postpartum, regardless of whether they had a high-risk pregnancy or not.

I experienced postpartum depression and anxiety following the birth of my son in May 2023. During my 37 week ultrasound, the doctor found that I had low amniotic fluid and I was sent to the hospital for a c-section. I experienced seizures and intense pain during my delivery. Before I left the hospital, I was screened for perinatal mood disorders.

Twelve days after returning home from the hospital, my son developed a cold and was sent to the ER where he had an EKG, MRI, chest Xray, and multiple blood tests. The tests came back normal and we were discharged. About a week later I had a nurse from Family Connects, a program offered through Frederick Health, visit my home. During the visit, she conducted a health assessment for my son and screened me for perinatal mood disorders. She left me with several fliers on PMADs and told me to let her know if my mood changed.

In late June my anxiety over my son's health began to spiral out of control. I found myself constantly crying, unable to sleep, and I started experiencing bouts of dizziness paired with nausea. At one point I remember staring at my son and wishing that he had never been born. I picked up the flier that the nurse gave me and immediately realized that I was experiencing postpartum anxiety. I texted the Family Connects nurse. She told me that if I was in crisis to call 211 and offered me additional PMAD-specific resources including online support groups through Postpartum Support International. I also quickly contacted a therapist who I continue to meet with monthly today. My son is now nine months old and I am so thankful that I had access to multiple screenings as well as the Family Connects program so that I could pinpoint the source of my symptoms and quickly find support.

New mothers in the United States are facing a mental health crisis. CDC data derived from the Maternal Mortality Review Committee in 36 states (2017-2019) investigated 1018 pregnancy-related deaths and found an underlying cause of death for 987 of these deaths. A staggering 22.7% of these deaths were related to mental health conditions with 62% of pregnancy-related suicide deaths occurring 43-365 days postpartum.

I am pleading for this bill in memory of my husband's best friend, Andrea Kolbe. Andrea died by suicide in December 2023 because of postpartum depression and psychosis. I believe that she would have gotten the help she needed with the screenings offered through this bill.