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Re: Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024 (HB1051/SB1059)

March 4, 2024

Dear Members of the Maryland House of Delegates and State Senate,  
the Health and Government Operations Committee,

I urge you to vote in favor of the Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024 (HB1051/SB1059). My name is Christopher Vocci and I am a concerned Maryland resident and suicide survivor. My dear sister-in-law, Andrea Kolbe, gave birth to a beautiful baby boy on August 24, 2023. She had a happy, healthy pregnancy, a long, but relatively unproblematic delivery, and the support and love of her entire family.

But, 15 weeks later, on December 11, 2023, one day after her 35<sup>th</sup> birthday, we lost her. The devastating effects of post-partum depression and psychosis ended in Andrea's suicide. In a time when our family should have been celebrating a growing family, a baby's first Christmas and all the joy captured within those moments, we instead were unexpectedly saying goodbye to the beautiful, kind soul that was our beloved Andrea.

At present, the lack of maternal health care, support, and resources available to new mothers is ill-suited and frankly appalling. The current healthcare system is dangerously lacking in structure adequate to support new Mothers at a time when they need it the most. Women in our country are essentially cast out of hospitals with all resources focused on their newborn children with little to no consideration of their own well-being.

Passing HB1051/SB1059 is paramount to provide new mothers and their partners with required Mental Health Care that at this time is dangerously lacking. By implementing these provisions, new mothers and their families can minimize and hopefully prevent the devastating loss like what our family have been through. The complicated grief, anger, sadness and unanswered questions has been unbearable and there are no words that could possibly convey the emotions we feel that surround this catastrophic event.

Andrea sought help from her Medical Practitioners and in her time of crisis, her Healthcare Providers were either unable or unwilling to work with and/or for her needs at that time when she needed them the most. We will forever be disappointed in them.

Andrea deserved more.  
Andrea deserved better.  
And now Andrea is gone.

But, there are plenty of other women out there who we can help.

With the passage of this bill, women will leave the hospital educated on the resources tailored to guide them through the post-partum depression phase, receive treatments so desperately needed and thus reduce the maternal mortality rate in Maryland.

1 in 4 women die by suicide as a result of post-partum depression, a truly alarming statistic, why this is not considered a national health emergency is difficult to fathom.

For our dear Andrea, for my nephew, Harbor "Lil Harbs," who will never know she who was grace personified as a dancer, a goofy prankster, and kind, beautiful soul that was his Mommy who loved him so. For my brother-in-law, an amazing Father to Harbor, her husband Chazz, now a Widower raising a Son alone. For all of Andrea's beloved family, friends and dancers left with shock and grief; and most important of all, for the new Mom out there, who feels terrified, alone and need of these resources, I urge you to give full consideration to this essential legislation and let them know that you care, we all care.

Thank you

Christopher Vocci