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Health and Government Operations
Committee

Subcommittees

Health Occupations and Long Term Care
Public Health and Minority
Health Disparities

House Chair

Joint Committee on Program Open Space
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB177 - Hospitals - Care of Infants After Discharge

February 7, 2024

Thank you Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Delegate Robbyn Lewis, testifying today on behalf of HB177, which will save many lives by ensuring new parents are educated on safe sleep practices for newborns before they leave the hospital.

In a world with so much uncertainty and risk, where even the simplest, most common sense and cost-effective solutions are contested, there is one thing we can all agree on: protecting the health of infants. Fortunately, many of the biggest risks to their survival are preventable, and one of the biggest is unsafe sleep practices. The bill before you will help to prevent sleep-related infant deaths by scaling a brilliant, successful program of the Baltimore City Health Department called “B’More Healthy Babies.”

According to the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the provisional infant mortality rate in 2022 was 5.60 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, 3% higher than the rate in 2021 (5.44). This rate is reported as the number of deaths per 1,000 live births, during the infant’s first year of life. This represents an increase: the neonatal mortality rate increased by 3% from 3.49 to 3.58, and the post-neonatal mortality rate by 4% (from 1.95 to 2.02) from 2021 to 2022.

Commonly recognized causes of infant death include birth defects, pre-term and low birth weight, and sleep-related causes, such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed. Sleep-related infant deaths can be prevented.

Recently, sleep-related infant deaths have increased significantly across our state. In 2020, 393 infants in Maryland died before reaching their first birthday, representing an infant mortality rate of 5.7 per 1,000 live births, which is higher than the national rate.

While there is, yet no definite way to prevent SIDS, there are ways to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death: safe sleep practices.

These practices include but are not limited to: always placing a baby on his or her back to sleep and keeping the baby’s sleep area free of soft objects, toys, crib bumpers, and loose bedding.

The Baltimore City Health Department's B'More Healthy Babies Program has developed successful approaches to educating parents in safe sleep practices. The bill before you scales these approaches statewide, to save more lives.

The bill is simple: it codifies the American Academy of Pediatrics policy on safe sleep practices and requires all birthing hospitals to provide educational information to parents or guardians at the time of discharge from the hospital. It defines "educational resources" and requires the Maryland Department of Health to continue displaying free, standardized examples of safe sleep educational resources.

This bill has been introduced in different postures before; I am confident that this version will achieve our greater goal of preventing sleep-related deaths in Maryland, because of the extensive, good-faith deliberations among the bill's stakeholders. This includes the Baltimore City Department of Health, the Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Hospital Association. We are finalizing a few minor amendments to the bill language, which should be resolved soon.

Thank you for your consideration. I request a favorable report on HB177.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robbyn Lewis", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Delegate Robbyn Lewis