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HB 170
Health – Maternal and Child Health Population Health Improvement Fund – Use
Hearing of the House Health & Government Operations Committee
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2:00 PM

FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. Expanding access to prenatal, birth and postpartum care is one of our longstanding advocacy priorities. **PJC strongly supports HB 170**, which would extend the date through which the Maternal and Child Health Population Health Improvement Fund may be used for expenses associated with maternal and child health population health improvements from December 31, 2025 to December 31, 2027.

The Fund provided a significant investment towards maternal and child health initiatives in Maryland, including the establishment of Medicaid reimbursement for doulas. Research supports that doula care improves health outcomes for pregnant individuals and their infants, including shorter labors, lower cesarean rates and higher breastfeeding initiation rates.¹ **Doulas** are non-medical birth workers who provide information, emotional support and advocacy for pregnant individuals during the prenatal, birth and postpartum period. While they do not provide medical advice, they augment routine prenatal care by providing necessary social and emotional support, individualized education and strategies to reduce stress and other barriers to healthy pregnancies.² As a direct result of this funding and the General Assembly's efforts to codify the doula Medicaid reimbursement regulations through House Bill 669 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Doula Services – Coverage (2022), Medicaid beneficiaries can now access these vital services. HB 170 would extend the timeframe in which the State may utilize the Fund, allowing more Marylanders to access necessary maternal and child health care.

¹ Amy Chen, *Routes to Success for Medicaid Coverage of Doula Care* (December 14, 2018) <https://9kqpw4dcaw91s37koz5jx17-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NHealthLawP-PTBi-Issue-Brief-DoulaMedicaidCoverage.pdf>.

² *Id.*

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 170**. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Woolard at 410-625-9409 x 224 or woolarda@publicjustice.org.