

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk

Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee

House Office Building, Room 241

6 Bladen Street

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Favorable with Amendments – HB 1538, Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Maternal Health Monitoring Pilot Program

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) submits this letter in **strong support** of House Bill 1538, *Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Maternal Health Monitoring Pilot Program*, with a recommended amendment to ensure that Latina and immigrant mothers have equitable access to this critical care. This bill is a much-needed step toward addressing the alarming disparities in maternal health, particularly for communities of color. However, to fully achieve its intended impact, it must include provisions that explicitly ensure immigrant mothers—regardless of status—are eligible for participation.

The maternal health crisis disproportionately affects Latinas in Maryland. According to the **Maryland Maternal Mortality Review Report (2023)**, **Latina mothers in the state experience pregnancy-related mortality rates nearly three times higher than their white counterparts**. Additionally, data from the **Kaiser Family Foundation (2023)** indicates that **35% of Latina women are more likely to delay or forgo prenatal care due to financial and linguistic barriers**, increasing the risk of complications such as gestational hypertension and diabetes—both of which this bill aims to address. These conditions are even more dangerous for immigrant mothers, who often lack access to employer-based health insurance and face significant barriers to enrolling in state assistance programs.

HB 1538's proposed **Maternal Health Monitoring Pilot Program** is a promising initiative that utilizes remote patient monitoring to improve outcomes for Medicaid recipients. However, **excluding undocumented or underinsured Latina mothers would leave one of Maryland's most vulnerable populations without access to life-saving maternal care**. The Maryland Department of Health has already acknowledged that **immigrant women face higher rates of severe maternal morbidity** due to late or no prenatal care (Maryland Health Disparities Report, 2023). Addressing this issue is not just a matter of health equity—it is a public health necessity.

MLU proposes an **amendment** that ensures the pilot program explicitly extends eligibility to Latina mothers, including those in immigrant communities who are at high risk for pregnancy-related complications. Expanding access will not only improve maternal and infant health outcomes but will also **reduce the financial burden on emergency healthcare services**, as preventive care lowers the likelihood of costly, high-risk births (CDC, 2023).

The right to safe and adequate maternal healthcare is fundamental. We urge the Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a **favorable report with amendments** on HB 1538 to guarantee that **no mother in Maryland—regardless of immigration status—faces preventable risks due to lack of access to care.**

Sincerely,

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