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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Finance Committee

Senate Bill 891 Public Health - Maternal and Child Mortality - Review and Perinatal Hospice Services

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you, Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee for this opportunity to present and request your support on Senate Bill 891- Public Health - Maternal and Child Mortality - Review and Perinatal Hospice Services.

The bill requires the Maryland Department of Health to publish a list of perinatal hospice services in Maryland on its website and requires the Department to provide an information sheet of these services in English and Spanish. It also would authorize physicians and nurse practitioners to inform patients of services available and provide the information sheet produced by the Department under this bill. Lastly, it would authorize that perinatal hospice programs may request to be on the Department's list. Senate Bill 891 would help ensure new parents can receive information about perinatal hospice support when facing a life-limiting diagnosis in utero and the likely loss of their child just hours or days after birth.

Perinatal hospice services may include support throughout the pregnancy, delivery, and post-partum period; guidance regarding medical decisions; assistance with making memories, pictures, or keepsakes; a personalized birth plan; pain relief for the baby if necessary; memorial or funeral service guidance; and coordinating discharge from the hospital to home or hospice program.

There are over 300 perinatal hospice programs in the United States, nine programs in the State of Maryland, and currently no perinatal hospice programs serving my constituents on the Eastern Shore. Perinatal hospice is widely accepted by medical professionals and generally covered by maternity and newborn care insurance. It emphasizes dignity, comfort and a peaceful experience for the whole family.

Seven states have passed similar legislation including the model legislation our bill is based on that passed in Nebraska in 2017, known as the Compassion and Care for Medically Challenging Pregnancies Act. It requires their health departments to provide perinatal hospice resources and make it easily accessible. Echoing other states' progress on access and transparency to these services, Senate Bill 891 would advance awareness of perinatal hospice in Maryland and greatly benefit families during a difficult time.

As an active member of the Maryland General Assembly's Women's Caucus, I recently had the pleasure of hearing from Dr. Dina El-Metwally who is a member of the Maryland Perinatal Clinical Advisory Committee at the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) for the taskforce of renewal of the Perinatal System Standards (2019-2024). I was alarmed that her research showed that there was a 120 percent increase of infant Mortality in Somerset County in my District since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The urgency to pass Senate Bill 891 is heightened given that the infant mortality rate has continued to increase and that families have lacked knowledge and resources, with minimal options. Eighty-eight (88) infants have died due to conditions that would likely have merited perinatal hospice in 2018. This does not include the number of families who received a prenatal diagnosis and chose termination or those who received a prenatal diagnosis and the infant was miscarried or stillborn. Senate Bill 891 would benefit several hundred Maryland families every year to access the available perinatal hospice resources.

I am pleased to report that there is broad support for the bill including several hospices in Maryland including Coastal Hospice in Salisbury, MD, the Hospice of Frederick County, the Compass Regional Hospice and Talbot Hospice that serves Talbot, Caroline, Queen Anne's and Kent Counties. Senate Bill 891 is also supported by the Maryland Catholic Conference and parents across the state.

My panel today will explain more of the direct benefits of perinatal hospice services and how it affects the lives of so many families. The panel includes Mary Peroutka who is the founder of the first perinatal hospice in Maryland, Heather Silver, perinatal hospice support staff and bereavement counselor at Silver Leaf Counseling in Anne Arundel County, and Meg Aeschlimann who is a parent that utilized perinatal hospice services.

I respectfully ask my colleagues on the Senate Finance Committee for a favorable report of Senate Bill 891.

Thank you for your kind consideration.