



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SB778 Maryland Medical Assistance Program- Children and Pregnant Women (Healthy Babies Equity Act)

Position: Support

By: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes persons who are unable to work, whose earnings are inadequate, or for whom jobs are not available have the right to services that are sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and access to health care. The League endorses standardizing the services provided under publicly funded health care programs and insurance reforms to achieve more equitable distribution.

In Maryland, the 2020 Census showed that Latinos are now twelve percent (12%) off the population equaling about 744,000 people. It is estimated that 250,000 people comprise the undocumented immigrant population. The term undocumented immigrant means a person residing in the state without legal documentation. It includes people entering the country without permission from the government or entering with a visa that has since expired.

Latinos contribute to the Maryland economy and work in every sector. The pandemic has increased the health needs and reduced health coverage among immigrant families. Immigrants work, living, and transportation situations put them at higher risk for exposure to COVID. In Maryland, immigrants must have legal documentation to be eligible for Medicaid. Even if they work and pay taxes. This requirement excludes undocumented immigrants from health coverage. Instead, they rely on safety net clinics and hospitals or do not receive any health care at all.

Access to health care before, during, and after pregnancy can affect health outcomes. In 2020, about 1 in 17 infants (6.0% of live births) were born to a woman receiving late or no prenatal care in Maryland according to the March of Dimes. Early and regular prenatal care is important for monitoring health, managing medical conditions, and sharing health information. Beyond health coverage, people of color face other barriers to care, including lack of access to culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Medicaid can help improve maternal and infant health and reduce health disparities for people of color by providing health coverage to low-income pregnant people.

SB778 requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide health care services to pregnant women that are currently ineligible for the program due to their immigration status. The bill will expand Medicaid coverage and access to health care services to undocumented pregnant people during their pregnancy and through one year postpartum. Other states, including Virginia, provide health coverage to pregnant people regardless of their immigration status either through Medicaid or state programs.

The League urges a favorable report for SB778.

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