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March 8, 2022

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Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Bill: SB 778 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Children and Pregnant Women (Healthy Babies Equity Act)

Position: Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County’s community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only underscored the need for robust funding for public health, but it also exposed significant, long-standing health inequities that leave many in our state behind. The Horizon Foundation believes that good health should be achievable for **everyone** – no matter who you are, where you live or where you come from. To that end, we **strongly urge a favorable vote on SB 778**, which would expand eligibility for prenatal care through Medicaid to all pregnant people, regardless of their immigration status. This change in eligibility would require the state to submit a state innovation waiver (under the 1115 of the Social Security Act) to allow Maryland to make this change to eligibility. It would cover care through pregnancy, and twelve months postpartum for both mother and child.

The lack of access to adequate prenatal and postpartum care in Maryland has been a huge problem for far too long. Howard County, which ranks as one of the healthiest communities in the state and the nation, has also fallen behind. In fact, we have exactly zero maternity clinics who will see uninsured women within our county borders. Far too often, women do not get the maternity care they need until very late in their pregnancy, or sometimes not at all.

This lack of access to prenatal and maternity care for pregnant women in Howard County and across the state disproportionately harms uninsured immigrants and women of color, leading to poor birth outcomes, including premature birth, low birth weight and even infant or maternal death.

According to Maryland Vital Records data, in 2019, almost 12% of Hispanic mothers and 8% of Black mothers in Howard County received late or no prenatal care – in the case of Hispanic mothers, that’s more than four times the percentage of white mothers.

In the same year, less than half of pregnant Hispanic women received prenatal care during the first trimester compared with more than 80% of white pregnant women. Instead of giving our children the foundation necessary to live long, healthy and vibrant lives, we have put obstacles in front of them – even before they are born.

All women in Maryland, regardless of immigration status, deserve access to quality prenatal care. Expanding health coverage for these critical services will help them have a healthy pregnancy and healthy babies.

We urge a favorable report on SB 778. Thank you for your consideration.