

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

Finance Committee
March 8, 2022

Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 778 which would require the State to provide Medicaid services to noncitizen pregnant women and their children until the child turns one.

Inspired by the Gospel mandates to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For almost 100 years, Catholic Charities has operated programs that allow Marylanders to age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, secure stable housing and welcome new neighbors. We recognize the importance of prenatal and postpartum medical care for the health and safety of both mother and child.

Prenatal care is an essential component of a healthy pregnancy. The monitoring that occurs during prenatal care allows for a medical professional to identify risk factors, monitor complications, screen for disease and encourage healthy habits. Without prenatal care, infants are more likely to have low birthweights and mothers are more likely to die from pregnancy related complications.

At the Esperanza Center Health Clinic, we see everyday the struggle immigrant mothers face when trying to obtain prenatal care. Their only options are to find a federally qualified health center who offers pre-natal care on a sliding scale and a hospital who will accommodate a payment plan for costs associated with Labor and Delivery. For many of our patients, even these reduced costs are too much. They often postpone or go without prenatal care completely, which can lead to avoidable complications during delivery and long-term health impacts for both mother and baby.

Maryland is currently ranked 19th for our low birthweight rate, 21st for our preterm birth rate and 27th for infant mortality.¹ We can and should do better. Expanding access to prenatal care is one step we can take to improve birth outcomes in Maryland.

There are currently seventeen states that have expanded and now provide prenatal care to undocumented pregnant immigrants. Prenatal and postpartum care are transformative. By joining the seventeen states across the nation and expanding Medicaid regardless of immigration status, we would be investing in the health of mothers and the future of Maryland.

For the reasons listed above, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 778.

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy

¹ Maryland: Key Health Indicators. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/maryland/md.htm>. Accessed 2/27/2022.