



## **Nzuri Malkia Birth Collective**

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### **HB 0069: Maryland Medical Assistance Program Doula Coverage**

#### **Support-**

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For over twenty years, I have supported families in Baltimore on the birth journey as a doula and now as a Reproductive Health & Justice Advocate, with a focus on bringing the family back into birthing. I am dedicated to upholding the belief, every person has the right to birth when, how and where they desire; as well as having the right to choose parenthood. While this may seem simple, the reality, within the state of Maryland those seeking to birth have limited birthing options; especially those who have their primary health insurance through Medicaid and Medicaid supported programs. As a Community-Based Doula, I see first-hand how this limitation places birthing families in a position of limited input into their care during pregnancy, at birth and in the postpartum period.

The Centers for Disease Control- National Center for Health Statistics have released new data on maternal mortality, the first since 2003. This report includes the following alarming statistics:

- The maternal mortality rate in the U.S. for 2018 was 17.4 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. This rate is higher than the last time NCHS published a national rate (12.7 in 2007), but the increase in the maternal mortality rate largely reflects changes in the way the data was collected and reported.
- Wide racial/ethnic gaps exist between non-Hispanic black (37.1 per 100,000 live births), non-Hispanic white (14.7), and Hispanic (11.8) women, which is consistent with earlier data.<sup>1</sup>

The alarming rates of maternal morbidity place the United States far below other industrialized countries, and even behind some countries designated as ‘third-world’. In the March of Dime recent ‘Report Card 2019’ gives Maryland a ‘C-’ for overall maternal health and birth outcomes when looking at ‘pre-term birth’ (babies born before the gestational age), with a rate of 10.7% of

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control, “First Date Release”,  
[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2020/202001\\_MMR.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2020/202001_MMR.htm), 2020

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control, ‘National Health Statistics’,  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/maryland/maryland.htm>, 2020

all births is a pre-term birth. As a state, we rank 13th with one of the highest rates of Cesarean Births.<sup>2</sup>

Maryland's rates of disparities in maternal health outcomes are in alignment with the national average with African American birthing persons 3 to 4 times more likely to die as a result of childbirth. One key solution, especially in the Medicaid population is the utilization of trained doula or perinatal community health workers. The American Public Health Association, in 2013 published the article 'Doula Care, Birth Outcomes, and Costs Among Medicaid Beneficiaries', demonstrating the practical and economic benefits of doula intervention. Reduced rates of pre-term birth, cesarean birth rates, and low-birth weights, and improved provider engagement.

The need for Maryland to explore this vital tool is crucial in addressing the high rates of mortality and morbidity, among African American birthing persons; as well as examining the need to address barriers to access to care for populations living in Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore. Creating a pathway and permanent mechanism with the Maryland Medicaid System for direct reimbursement of doula and other perinatal support would work in tandem with current efforts taken by the Maryland Department of Health's "Maryland Health Improvement Program" as well as efforts by MDMom.

1 Centers for Disease Control, "First Date Release",  
[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2020/202001\\_MMR.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2020/202001_MMR.htm), 2020

2 Centers for Disease Control, 'National Health Statistics',  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/maryland/maryland.htm>, 2020