



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1080
Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Children and Pregnant Women
(Healthy Babies Equity Act)
FAVORABLE**

March 2, 2022

Dear Chair Pendergrass and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of House Bill 1080. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders.

We ask you to support this legislation as a matter of equity for undocumented families.

When Maryland families succeed, our state succeeds – and we all know it takes a village to keep families healthy, safe, and thriving. Currently the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which has been extended to cover pregnant people, does not cover the thousands of undocumented individuals that reside in Maryland. Notably, from 2010-2014 about [7% of Maryland children](#) were living with at least one undocumented family member, and that number is likely even higher today. We owe it to our children and communities to support the Healthy Babies Equity Act, which provides comprehensive medical care through CHIP to undocumented pregnant people who would qualify for the Program but for their immigration status.

There are a multitude of reasons why undocumented people lack access to prenatal care, from linguistic and literacy obstacles to the inability to take time off work to mistrust in the healthcare system and fear of immigration authorities' retaliation when seeking services. Lack of access to prenatal care not only [increases the risk](#) of labor and delivery complications and of injury or illness affecting the baby, but also increases public costs throughout the lives of both parent and child.

We know that extending coverage to undocumented mothers improves outcomes all-around. [The Maternal Health Task Force at Harvard University](#) found that after Oregon extended health insurance coverage to undocumented mothers, expecting individuals reported attending “an average of seven more doctor visits, the rate of screening for gestational diabetes increased by 61 percent, and the number who received at least one fetal ultrasound increased by 74 percent.”

Increased and improved levels of care led to a decrease in child mortality and low birth weights among children of undocumented mothers.

Maryland has the capacity to become a national leader in safeguarding undocumented families, and that begins with passing the Healthy Babies Equity Act. For these reasons, we implore you to support extending prenatal care to expecting undocumented individuals and report favorably on HB 1080.