

Testimony in Support of HB1080

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee
Senate Finance Committee

Submitted by Sosseh Prom
February 28, 2022

Dear Committee Members:

I hope this message finds you well and thank you for accepting and considering written testimony regarding House Bill 1080. African Communities Together (ACT) is in strong support of HB1080, the Healthy Babies Equity Act. ACT is a national nonprofit dedicated towards improving the lives of African immigrants in the United States, and empowers African immigrants to integrate socially, advance economically and engage civically. ACT also connects these immigrants to critical services that can help them not only survive, but thrive in their new home.

ACT supports HB1080 because we believe healthcare is a human right, and not a privilege that should only be accessible to a select few. Unfortunately, our current reality is that Black and Brown families (including immigrant families) are at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to receiving meaningful access to such vital resources. At the bare minimum, members of the most vulnerable groups (i.e. low-income women and children) should be provided access to quality healthcare services. Unless something is done soon, we will continue to find ourselves in an ongoing healthcare crisis where vulnerable groups find themselves disproportionately disadvantaged. COVID-19 has ravaged our communities and along with the obvious health concerns, has caused housing instability and income insecurity. As a result, families now find themselves with limited options and having to make hard-hitting decisions. To give a more direct example, a pregnant mother should never have to choose between paying her rent and avoiding eviction, or going into extreme medical debt to ensure the safe delivery of her baby. With these bills, we now have an opportunity to lessen the negative impacts of the pandemic and make sure that vulnerable groups are able to avoid the additional burden of accruing substantial medical bills.

It is for these reasons that ACT strongly supports HB1080. The bill would expand eligibility for prenatal care through Medicaid to all pregnant people, regardless of immigration status. This change in eligibility would require the state to submit a state innovation waiver (under 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.

There are currently seventeen states that have expanded and now provide prenatal care to undocumented pregnant immigrant people. In Maryland, 6% of births were to people who had received late or no prenatal care in 2020. Prenatal and postpartum care are transformative, especially in communities of color, in preserving the protecting the lives of children and their mothers. By joining the seventeen states across the nation and expanding Medicaid to pregnant

people regardless of immigration status, we would be investing in the health of mothers and the future of Maryland. It is why we urge a favorable report for HB1080.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sosseh Prom', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Sosseh Prom, Esq.

She/Her/Hers

State Policy Manager, African Communities Together

Cell: 202-834-3595

Email: sosseh@africans.us