



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 23, 2022

House Bill 1080- Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Children and Pregnant Women

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 1080-Maryland Medical Assistance Program-Children and Pregnant Women-Healthy Babies Equity Act.

MRHA supports this legislation that would eliminate immigration status as a barrier to enrollment in the Medicaid program for pregnant women and their children. If women are otherwise eligible for Medicaid, they will be able to enroll and maintain coverage through one year post-partum.

This expansion would have a positive impact on rural Maryland. The Healthy Babies Equity Act aligns with our legislative priorities to expand access to health care and support the goals of the Maryland Model and Statewide Integrated Health Improvement Strategy to improve maternal and child health outcomes. Further, this bill represents a significant and appropriate investment in efforts to address disparities in birth outcomes.

The primary goal of this bill is to expand access to prenatal care. Prenatal care is associated with more positive birth outcomes for both the child and the mother. Yet, due to lack of coverage, the first care some mothers receive is in the delivery room. Expanding Medicaid coverage will help these families and also draw resources to support rural health care providers and hospitals that are otherwise uncompensated for births from uninsured people who are unable to pay. According to the Urban Institute, seventeen states already provide this coverage.¹ It is time for Maryland to join this effort, as a part of the state's coordinated efforts to reduce maternal mortality.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we urge your favorable review.

Jennifer Berkman, MEd Board President 443-783-0480

¹ The Urban Institute. [The Public Health Insurance Landscape for Pregnant and Postpartum Women: State and Federal Policies in 2020 \(urban.org\)](https://www.urban.org/policy-centers-and-programs/public-health-insurance-landscape-for-pregnant-and-postpartum-women)



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