

Dear House Health and Government Operations Committee Members,

I am a resident of MD District 21 and a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. **I am testifying in support of House Bill 1080, the Healthy Children Equity Act.**

This bill would expand eligibility for the Maryland Children's Health Program so that children qualify regardless of immigration status, and pregnant persons qualify for prenatal care regardless of immigration status. The bill would require that Maryland submit the appropriate waiver to allow this expansion of eligibility for the program.

The Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) is Maryland's implementation of the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (often referred to as CHIP), which was intended to provide insurance to kids from lower-income families who didn't qualify for Medicaid. Children covered under MCHP have all their care covered, from sick and emergency room visits to regular check-ups, vaccinations, dental and vision care, and mental health. The program also casts its umbrella over pregnant persons, to whom it provides prenatal care to make sure children get a healthy start as well as postpartum care. The primary eligibility factor, stated in the law itself, is household income; unfortunately, Maryland's MCHP regulations also require that children either be US citizens or part of a narrow group of "qualified" immigrants to be able to receive health care through MCHP. This is based on a federal rule, but Maryland could expand its coverage to folks not covered under the federal rules by applying for a waiver from the federal government.

Seventeen states, plus New York City and the District of Columbia, currently provide extended coverage to pregnant people regardless of immigration status. The need in Maryland is critical, since 1 in 14 infants in Maryland is born to a person receiving no prenatal care, and babies whose mother did not receive prenatal care are three times more likely to have low birth weight and be subject to complications of birth. Black and Latinx mothers are particularly at risk, since they have higher rates of uninsurance than their white counterparts. Simply put, making prenatal care available to those who cannot afford it and would therefore not otherwise receive it can result in lower maternal mortality and healthier babies.

Health care is a human right. Healthy kids are more likely to grow into healthy, productive adults, which makes applying MCHP to all kids a wise public policy; but more than that, making sure Maryland's kids get health care regardless of where they were born or who their parents are is a matter of basic human decency. Likewise, no pregnant person or newborn should face the risk of injury or death because they don't fall into a narrow window of immigration eligibility set by federal law. It is Maryland's longstanding public policy that kids shouldn't go without healthcare just because their families can't afford it: all this bill does is recognize that kids of immigrant parents deserve the same treatment as any other child.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of House Bill 1080.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Linda Girdner
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