



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 8, 2022

Senate Bill 778

Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Children and Pregnant Women (Healthy Babies Equity Act)

Senate Finance Committee

Position: SUPPORT w/ Amendment

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the mutual public-policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. We offer this testimony in support with an amendment of Senate Bill 778.

SB 778 would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide comprehensive medical care and other health care services to certain noncitizen pregnant women and their children up to a certain age.

In 2018, 30% of pregnant women in Maryland received inadequate prenatal care, and 7% of pregnant women received late (third trimester) or no prenatal care. The picture worsens for Black and Latina mothers who were twice as likely to receive late or no prenatal care.¹ In Prince George's County, just half of Latina mothers received adequate prenatal care in 2017.²

Lack of prenatal care is implicated in maternal and infant mortality, preterm birth, low birth weight, and worse health outcomes for mothers and infants, all of which disproportionately impact our low-income, minority and immigrant communities in the state. The barriers for women receiving prenatal care include lack of access, high cost especially for the uninsured, and the fact that thousands of noncitizen mothers are ineligible for Medicaid; this bill would go a long way to help close the healthcare gap for pregnant noncitizen mothers and their children.

Our Catholic healthcare systems, hospitals and clinics serve mothers and their children, including noncitizen mothers, who could not otherwise afford healthcare every day and this bill would help to ensure more women and children receive the care they need. The Conference works to support efforts that are life-affirming.

¹ Maryland Department of Health, [Vital Statistics Report](#), 2018

² Prince George's County Health Department, [Maternal and Infant Health Report](#), 2019

While we laud the efforts of this bill to provide much needed care to noncitizen women and their children, the language in the bill is somewhat broad and could have the unintended consequence of paying for abortions for noncitizen mothers since the Maryland Medical Assistance Program does fund abortions. We would suggest the following amendment (in red) be included on page 2 line 19 of the bill:

(XVII) SHALL PROVIDE, SUBJECT TO THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STATE BUDGET, COMPREHENSIVE MEDICAL CARE AND OTHER HEALTH CARE SERVICES, **NOT INCLUDING ABORTION SERVICES, TO NONCITIZEN PREGNANT WOMEN WHO WOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PROGRAM BUT FOR THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS AND TO THEIR CHILDREN UP TO THE AGE OF 1 YEAR.**

For these reasons, we urge a **FAVORABLE W/ AMENDMENT** report on SB 778.