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**SB 644**  
**Maternal Mortality Review Program – Local Teams – Access to Information and Records**  
**Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee**  
**March 3, 2023**  
**1:00 PM**

**SUPPORT**

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports SB 644**, which would require that a local Maternal Mortality Review (MMR) team be provided immediate access to requested information and records, including information on prenatal care maintained by a health care provider regarding a woman whose death is being reviewed by the local team.

We thank the Maryland General Assembly for passing [HB 796/SB 602 \(2019\)](#) which enabled each county to establish a local MMR team. Every woman deserves quality and culturally competent health care during pregnancy, labor and postpartum. Yet too often, pregnant and postpartum women slip through the cracks in our healthcare system, creating disparities in maternal health outcomes. These disparities persist in Maryland where maternal mortality among Black women is four times higher than the rate among White women.<sup>1</sup> Though Maryland's overall MMR has decreased, the racial gap is growing, according to the most recent data available from the Maryland MMR Program, as white MMR decreased by 56.7% and Black MMR decreased by only 12%.<sup>2</sup> In 2018, the most recently available data, 83% of all pregnancy-related deaths were found to be preventable.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding community-level factors is vital to preventing maternal mortality as many of our low-income rural and urban communities have significant gaps in access to comprehensive maternal healthcare, including prenatal care. SB 644, if passed, would help Maryland in furthering its mission to eliminate maternal mortality by ensuring that local

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<sup>1</sup> [Maryland Department of Health, Annual Report Maryland Maternal Mortality Review \(2021\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

MMR teams can access necessary information without delays on the prenatal care received by a woman who has died. Prenatal care not only helps women prepare for the birth of a child, but it also enables providers to detect and prevent serious health complications, including maternal and infant death.<sup>4</sup> This data would put local teams in a better position to make and implement recommendations on how best to ensure that all women, regardless of where they reside, have access to life-saving prenatal care in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 644**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 ext. 224 or [blacka@publicjustice.org](mailto:blacka@publicjustice.org).

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<sup>4</sup> [Jonas J. Swartz, et. al, \*Expanding Prenatal Care to Unauthorized Immigrant Women and the Effects on Infant Health\*, 130 \*Obstetrics & Gynecology\* 938 \(2017\).](#)