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SB 376
Health Occupations – Licensed Direct-Entry-Midwives – Previous Cesarean Section
Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee
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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. **The PJC stands in strong support of SB 376**, which would allow a licensed direct-entry midwife to assume or take responsibility for a client who had a previous cesarean section. It also requires the Maryland Board of Nursing, in consultation with the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems and other specified stakeholders to develop a standard planned out-of-hospital birth transport protocol for patients who meet the criteria.

PJC supports the right of patients to make informed decisions about the maternal health options that are best for them and their family. However, Maryland law prevents women who have had a previous cesarean section (c-section) from accessing home birth providers. This birthing prohibition creates a disparity in access between women who have never had a c-section and the 33.7% of women in Maryland who have had a c-section.¹ This gap is even greater for Black women in Maryland compared to their White counterparts as c-section delivery rates were highest for Black women at 38.9% in 2020.² Similarly, women in rural counties, including Somerset which is a maternity care desert³, have even less access to certain maternity care providers and birthing options.

¹ Maryland Department of Health, *Maryland Vital Statistics Annual Report (2020)*, <https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Reports%20and%20Data/Annual%20Reports/2020Annual.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ March of Dimes, *Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the U.S.* (2022), <https://www.marchofdimes.org/maternity-care-deserts-report>.

SB 376 would expand birthing options for pregnant women in Maryland who choose to pursue a vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) from a licensed direct-entry midwife. Opening access to VBAC as an option for women promotes positive health outcomes, including less blood loss, shorter recovery times, and lower risk for infection and other complications. SB 376 is consistent with Maryland's mission to improve health equity and healthcare access for women, including women of color and women residing in rural areas. This legislation also supports informed decision making and would allow women who want to have the experience of a vaginal delivery the option to do so.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 376** to promote access to patient-centered maternal health care and health equity. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.