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Mayor

*Office of Government Relations
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SB0644

March 3, 2023

TO: Members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 644 – Maternal Mortality Review Program - Local Teams - Access to Information and Records

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Griffith, Vice-Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 644.

In an effort to prevent maternal mortality, SB 644 requires that upon request of the chair of a local maternal mortality review (MMR) team, the local team is to be provided immediate access to requested information, including prenatal care records and all records maintained by any State or local government agency. Maternal mortality review teams work to identify maternal deaths, determine if and how the deaths could have been prevented, and make recommendations to legislators and health care facilities on ways to prevent future maternal deaths.¹ These teams' work is key to reducing maternal deaths in our state.

In 2019, the Baltimore City Health Department worked to pass legislation to allow health departments in local jurisdictions in Maryland to convene local MMR teams in order to address the crisis of maternal mortality. The legislation passed was a compromise that required local teams to obtain summary medical record information about each case of maternal death from the Maryland State Maternal Mortality Review Committee, operated by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), rather than accessing and abstracting the medical records independently. In 2021, Baltimore City launched its local MMR team. The team has experienced difficulty obtaining the summary medical record information from MDH, leading to delayed reviews and cancelled meetings. In addition, when summary medical record information is received from MDH, these documents have critical gaps in information regarding counseling and medical interventions received, leaving the local team with unanswered questions at each review that prevent the team from making effective recommendations. This legislation would amend the existing local MMR

¹ Maryland Department of Health. (n.d.). Maternal Mortality Review (MMR) Program. Retrieved from <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/pages/mmr.aspx>

team legislation to require that health care providers provide access to medical records associated with each case to the local MMR team upon request, enabling local teams to access and abstract the records independently.

Although there may be concern that passage of this legislation would be duplicative and result in an inundation of records requests for health care providers, there are a dozen or fewer maternal deaths in Baltimore City each year and fewer in other jurisdictions. The increase in records requests that would result from this legislation would be nominal and would provide the local team with a wealth of benefits in achieving its purpose. It may also be argued that there is nothing in the original statute that prevents local teams from requesting medical records. While this is true, there is also nothing in the original statute that would compel a provider to provide the local team access to medical records upon request. Without passage of this legislation, health care providers would be highly unlikely to share records due to patient privacy concerns.

Expanding access to medical records for local MMR teams would support teams in doing the very important work of understanding the factors contributing to maternal deaths, identifying systems gaps, recommending strategies to prevent future maternal deaths, and working with community partners to implement and evaluate those strategies. We urge legislators to support this legislation to protect the well-being of mothers in our local community and statewide.

For these reasons, we request a **favorable** report on SB 644.