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Personal Testimony on SB156/HB334: Erica Blake

Frederick County parent of two, Family Connects patient

Member of the Family Connects Frederick County Leadership Advisory Council

I am writing to share my personal experience with Family Connects Frederick County.

I had my son at Frederick Health Hospital. Before I left the hospital, a Family Connects staff person scheduled my nurse visit for when my son was 3 weeks old. The nurse visited us at home and helped us with two critical health issues – our son’s breathing issues and my own postpartum anxiety.

First the nurse identified that our son had respiratory distress. This was the second occurrence in a two-week period. At the end of the visit, she suggested I take him to the emergency department.

Second, the nurse screened me for perinatal mood disorders – as the hospital had done before discharge. Both screenings were negative at the time they were done. The Family Connects nurse left me with fliers that explained the symptoms and told me to let her know if my mood changed.

Several weeks later, my anxiety over my son’s health began to spiral. I found myself constantly crying, unable to sleep, and I started experiencing bouts of dizziness with nausea. At one point I remember staring and my son and wishing that he had never been born.

I picked up the flier that the nurse gave me and immediately realized that I was experiencing postpartum anxiety. I texted the Family Connects nurse to get help figuring out what to do. She suggested additional postpartum-specific resources including online support groups through Postpartum Support International. With her guidance, I quickly contacted a therapist who I continue to meet with monthly. Before our conversation ended, she made sure that I knew to call 211 if I ever felt I was in crisis.

My son is now 19 months old and I am so thankful that I had access to her expertise in my home for my son and the additional screening. The support of the Family Connects nurse helped me pinpoint two critical issues and quickly find support. I don’t know what would have happened to my son or to myself without her guidance.

New mothers like me all over are facing a mental health crisis. My husband’s best friend died by suicide in December 2023 because of postpartum depression and psychosis. I believe that she would have gotten the help she needed if she had had access to Family Connects.

Our family’s story with Family Connects is not unique. That’s why I am writing to you on behalf of the other families and advocates on the Frederick County Leadership Advisory Council urging you to support SB156/HB334 to establish a newborn nurse home visiting program with dedicated sustainable funding so that all Maryland families with newborns can access Family Connects.

Thank you!

Sincerely, Erica Blake