



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

SB 0156 – Universal Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Services - Program Establishment and Insurance Coverage

DATE: January 29, 2025
COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee
POSITION: Favorable
FROM: The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I urge the committee to give **SB 0156 – Universal Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Services - Program Establishment and Insurance Coverage** a favorable report.

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I am proud of the steps we have taken locally to implement the Family Connects model and the positive outcomes we have already seen. SB 0156 would expand this evidence-based program statewide by establishing dedicated, sustainable funding through reimbursement for the service by commercial insurance payers and Medicaid. Expanding this program will help reduce maternal health disparities, improve maternal and infant health outcomes, and reduce healthcare costs, ultimately benefiting families across Maryland.

Research consistently shows that the first few months following childbirth are a critical period for the newborn, the birthing parent, and the entire family. Unfortunately, many families experience gaps in care during this vital time, often exasperated by social isolation. The Family Connects model, which SB 0156 seeks to implement statewide, offers all families with newborns a free home visit from a registered nurse approximately three weeks after delivery or adoption. This visit is designed to assess both the maternal and infant health of the family, identify any potential risks, and connect them to personalized resources and services that address their specific needs. Families may receive up to three additional visits within the first 12 weeks after delivery. The universal nature of this approach—unique among home visiting models—ensures that no family feels singled out or stigmatized for seeking help and that the program is able to reach every family that could benefit from it. This approach helps increase participation, especially in communities where access to healthcare services may otherwise be limited or stigmatized.

In Frederick County, we began implementing the Family Connects model in January of 2023, using seed funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Over the first 24 months, 2660 families have received home visits. Through these visits, we have seen firsthand how the Family Connects model is improving health outcomes for our residents. Families have reported life-saving interventions, such as guidance on managing high blood pressure, addressing postpartum depression and anxiety, and responding to infant respiratory distress. Additionally, many families have reported better access to maternal and mental health care, improved connections to community resources for breastfeeding, nutrition, diapers, and childcare, and increased support through local support groups.

We have also collected data that highlights the effectiveness of this program in reducing healthcare costs and improving long-term outcomes. Studies of the Family Connects model show that it reduces infant emergency department visits and overnight stays by 60% within the first six months and reduces child protective services investigations by 40% for up to five years. The return on investment for infant healthcare alone is impressive, with every \$1 invested in the program yielding \$3.17 in savings. These

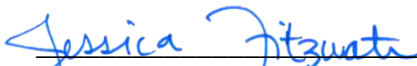
outcomes demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of the program and its long-term benefits for the health and well-being of Frederick County families.

The data we have gathered in Frederick County has been invaluable in shaping how we continue to tweak and expand our program in collaboration with Frederick Health. As we have seen more families benefit from the program, we have used that data to refine our approach and ensure that we are meeting the evolving needs of our community and maximizing the impact of the ARPA funds available. Importantly, the Family Connects Frederick County program harnesses one of Frederick’s biggest assets, community partnership, to guide its work through the Community Partner Council and the Leadership Advisory Council. The success we have experienced locally provides a strong foundation for expanding the Family Connects model across Maryland.

Moreover, the Family Connects program aligns with Governor Wes Moore’s broader agenda to lift families up and provide them with the tools and resources they need to succeed. By investing in the well-being of Maryland’s newborns and their families, we are investing in the future of our state. This program ensures that every family, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, has access to the resources and support they need during this critical early period.

As we look toward the future, we remain committed to making data-informed decisions to continue improving the Family Connects model. The success we’ve seen in Frederick County serves as proof of the program’s effectiveness, and expanding it statewide will ensure that every family in Maryland can benefit from this life-changing support.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 0156. By passing this legislation, we will provide all Maryland families with the opportunity to benefit from the Family Connects program, reduce maternal and infant health disparities, improve health outcomes, and reduce healthcare costs across our state.



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD