



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 18, 2025

Senate Bill 676

**Health Care Facilities - Hospitals and Freestanding Birthing Centers - Perinatal
Care Standards**

Senate Finance Committee

Position: Information

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 676 requires the Maryland Department of Health to adopt regulations establishing minimum perinatal care standards meet or exceed the Maryland Perinatal System Standards for each hospital that provides obstetrical services; and requiring each hospital that provides obstetrical services and freestanding birthing centers, as a condition of licensure, to comply with certain minimum perinatal care standards.

Establishing perinatal care standards is essential to safeguarding the health and safety of both mothers and babies throughout pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Childbirth is a complex medical process that requires proper oversight and timely interventions. Complications such as breech positioning, umbilical cord entanglement, or preexisting maternal health conditions can quickly escalate, making it critical for both hospitals and freestanding birthing centers to have clear, standardized protocols in place. By implementing consistent perinatal care standards, healthcare facilities can ensure that staff are adequately trained and prepared to manage complications, improving outcomes for both mothers and newborns. Women of color experience significantly higher rates of severe maternal morbidity (SMM) and establishing these standards can help reduce these disparities by ensuring equitable, high-quality care for all patients.

Minimum perinatal care requirements also help reduce infant and maternal mortality rates, prevent unnecessary labor inductions, and lower premature birth rates.¹ Ensuring that all birthing facilities follow evidence-based care protocols is essential to improving maternal and infant health outcomes and creating safer birth experiences for all families. Every life is a miracle and deserves the highest level of care and protection. As Scripture reminds us, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you*” (Jeremiah 1:5).² This profound truth underscores the responsibility to uphold the dignity of life by ensuring minimum care standards that safeguard the health and well-being of both mothers and their babies. By establishing and maintaining these standards, we affirm the sanctity of life and provide the necessary support for safe and healthy babies.

While this legislation seeks to standardize perinatal care, it may be unnecessary, as hospitals already adhere to established policies based on clinical guidelines, evidence-based medicine, and state regulations. It is important to consult healthcare facilities to determine whether this legislation genuinely improves care or imposes unnecessary regulatory burdens. While consistency in care is essential, hospitals and freestanding birth centers must retain the ability to align their practices with their missions, particularly faith-based institutions.

A significant concern is that the proposed standards could mandate abortion services. Catholic hospitals uphold the principle that lifesaving care includes protecting both the pregnant mother and her unborn child. Guided by the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, Catholic hospitals remain committed to providing high-quality care to all patients. We advocate for policies that ensure the best, most accessible care—especially in complex cases—while respecting the dignity of both women and their preborn children.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for this information to be considered on **SB 676**.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://www.jointcommission.org/what-we-offer/certification/certifications-by-setting/hospital-certifications/certifications-for-perinatal-care/perinatal-care-certification/#:~:text=sooner%20if%20desired.-,Certification%20Helps%20Drive%20Improvement,dueto%20pregnancy%20related%20complications>

² <https://capp-usa.org/amoris-laetitia/>