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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Bonnie Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1251 – THE DOULA AND BIRTH POLICY  
TRANSPARENCY ACT

House Bill 1251 is a bill to create transparency in maternal health and birth policies in Maryland healthcare facilities, to ensure that patients have a full understanding of the care they are receiving and the autonomy to make decisions about their own health care. This is especially important for Black women who experience some of the most stark inequities in care and outcomes in the maternal health space. Maryland has taken steps to address these inequities, including passing the Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024 which codified essential data reporting for maternal health and patient-centered health care metrics. House Bill 1251 takes the next step by ensuring all patients have transparency into birth policies with the providers they choose, so they are able to safely and effectively navigate the maternal health system and advocate for the care and outcomes they want.

House Bill 1251 requires healthcare facilities in Maryland that provide obstetric care to establish several patient-centered policies that lead to better communication, better care, and better outcomes. These policies include:

- Policies to ensure that patients are able to utilize doula services and do not have the difficult decision of choosing whether their doula or their partner or family can be with them during labor and delivery. Doulas provide physical, cultural and emotional support during pregnancy, labor and after birth and consistently lead to better experiences and outcomes for patients and families. This has been especially evident for women of color. Removing obstacles to these services is essential to providing equitable maternal health care;
- Policies that prioritize newborn bonding to the benefits of all patients and families;
- Require informed consent for significant medical interventions, including cesarean section and medication to induce labor, which ensure patients have full understanding of what care they are receiving, any risks and the ability to make informed decisions on their own behalf. Effective informed consent leads to better experiences, less litigation and helps to lower the rate of unnecessary and risky interventions; and

- Policies to ensure a clear transfer and acceptance process for patients transferring into facility care from a home birth provider, which ensures that patients have a full range of maternal health options and can safely move across providers
- Additionally, HB1251 creates transparency in birth policies, and potential care restrictions, from liability insurers for health care facilities.

Having a full understanding of all these policies allows patients to choose the practitioners and providers that work for them. Transparent information and strong communication with patients are the cornerstones of making patients feel comfortable and preserving the key role they play in their own care. This bill is based largely on similar legislation passed in Colorado in 2021 as part of a comprehensive birth equity legislative package, and patients in Maryland deserve those same protections. It is a priority of the Maryland Women's Caucus, supported by the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland, and supported by patients across the state.

I kindly urge a favorable report of House Bill 1251.