



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

Advancing
**Human Rights and
Justice for All**

**HB0334 - Universal Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Services - Program
Establishment and Insurance Coverage**

Hearing before the House Health and Government Operations Hearing

January 29, 2025

Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits written and oral testimony on HB0334

MLA serves residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions providing free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents in a range of civil legal matters. MLA is Maryland's largest civil non-profit law firm, representing vulnerable young people in Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) matters across the State of Maryland. SB0156 is an important measure to provide support to families in a crucial period in a child's life and to promote family unity and stability. MLA urges the Committee's favorable report on HB0334.

Newborn nurse home visiting services use evidenced-based programs that play a crucial role not only in promoting the health and wellbeing of newborns and their families but also in reducing the necessity of interventions by the Department of Social Services (DSS). Currently these services are available for parents that receive Medicaid. HB120 would extend newborn nurse home visiting services to all families with newborns residing in the State.

Early, consistent, and supportive in-home care can prevent many of the issues that lead to investigations, foster care placements, or other forms of DSS intervention. For many new parents, especially those in vulnerable situations, the stress of caring for a newborn can be overwhelming. With proper guidance and resources, parents will have more support with the basics of infant care, mental health challenges such as postpartum depression, or lack of knowledge about infant safety. Addressing the root causes of concerns around infant and maternal health provides an effective, proactive approach to family support that has been shown to reduce reports of child neglect or maltreatment, while ensuring the safety and stability of children.

Newborn nurse home visiting services offer new parents the opportunity to receive expert, personalized care and guidance in their own home. Nurses can provide education on safe sleep practices, proper

feeding techniques, infant hygiene, developmental milestones, parenting skills, and information on community resources, all of which contribute to a nurturing and safe environment for children and families.

In addition, the program can provide early identification of mental health issues, stress control and postpartum complications that may lead to unsafe situations. Postpartum depression and anxiety, if undiagnosed and untreated, can result in mothers feeling overwhelmed and unable to care for their children. Nurses are trained to recognize signs of these mental health issues and can offer appropriate referrals to mental health services or other support programs.

By providing this early intervention, the program reduces the likelihood of situations where the DSS would need to intervene. The proactive support offered by the nurses helps address issues before they escalate to the point where child removal or foster care placements become necessary. Additionally, by fostering positive parenting practices, the program helps maintain family integrity. This proactive approach benefits both families and communities.

Maryland Legal Aid urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 334 and urge its ultimate passage. If you have any questions, please contact: Erica I. LeMon, Advocacy Director for Children’s Rights at elemon@mdlabor.org (410) 951-7648 or (410) 935-0937.