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Personal Testimony

Hearing 2/27 at 1pm

Senate Finance Committee

Health, Health Insurance, and Health Occupations- Perinatal Mental Health Conditions (SB0891)

Position: Favorable

Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Erica Blake, I am here today as a member of the Family Connects Frederick County Leadership Advisory Council and as a woman who personally struggled with perinatal mental health disorders after the birth of my son. I strongly support SB0891, Health, Health Insurance, and Health Occupations- Perinatal Mental Health Conditions (SB0891).

I had my son at Frederick Health Hospital. Before I left the hospital, a Family Connects staff member 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 and 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 for help and she suggested additional postpartum-specific resources including online support groups through Postpartum Support International. With her guidance, I quickly contacted a therapist who I continued to meet with monthly.

My son is now close to three years old, and I am thankful that I had access to her expertise and additional screenings. 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, Andrea Kolbe, died by suicide in December 2023 from postpartum depression and psychosis. I believe she would still be alive if she received the multiple mental health screenings that I did.

Our stories aren’t rare. That’s why I am writing to you on behalf of all mothers urging you to support SB0891 to establish provider education on perinatal mental health disorders and multiple screenings before and after birth.

Thank you for your time and leadership,

Sincerely, Erica Blake