

**Hearing 2/27 at 1:00 p.m.**  
**Senate Finance Committee**

**Health, Health Insurance, and Health Occupations - Perinatal Mental Health Conditions**  
**(SB 891)**

**Position: Favorable**

Chair Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Lauren Thompson, and I write this letter in strong **support** of SB 891, Health, Health Insurance, and Health Occupations - Perinatal Mental Health Conditions. This bill would expand perinatal mental health screenings and require patient and provider training related to perinatal mental health. In short, this bill will save lives.

I became pregnant with my first, unexpectedly, at the age of 23. I was visiting doctors prenatally with my boyfriend - we were excited and nervous about what was to come. At the time, I was happy – I was madly in love with my partner, had always loved children, completed my Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Biology pre-Medical track the year prior, and was on the brink of a new phase in life.

As my pregnancy progressed, I became more and more anxious about the wellbeing of my baby and my capacity to care for her. Depression began to creep in. Sleeplessness became a norm. Intrusive thoughts and hypervigilance dominated my thoughts, worsened postpartum, and did not leave me for years.

I filled out screening forms at the OB/GYN and Pediatrician several times. Where did those screening forms go? No one explained the screenings or followed up when I screened at-risk.

None of the various providers I saw in the maternity care system asked me about my disclosed history of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. They didn't ask about my disclosed history of substance use. They didn't ask or counsel about my personal and family health history that put me at increased risk for perinatal mental health disorders. They didn't provide resources, hotlines, warmlines, support groups, educational information, referrals, medication options, or a safe place to disclose my fears.

After years of suffering from untreated mental illness – an illness that hurt me, my child, and my family – I was finally diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Depression. I thought many times about ending my life for the betterment of my family while postpartum. I am grateful to still be here. There is no reason parents should be succumbing to treatable diseases in the perinatal period – a time when they intersect with the health system the most – leaving a large and painful hole in families and communities that ripples for generations.

I used to blame providers for this negligence. Now – 13 years later with 3 children, doula training, a master’s degree in perinatal mental health research, and years of experience supporting tender parents in similar situations – I now know it is a systemic issue. Providers need the education, tools, referral pathways, and time to be able to support expecting parents.

The health and screening system, as it stands, is not protecting Marylanders from the negative impacts of preventable mental illness and death. Treatment, solutions, and resources exist and are already being utilized in Maryland. SB 891 is a step in the right direction, and will strengthen the existing screening programs across the state.

Parents, parents-to-be, families, and communities in Maryland would greatly benefit from the passage of this bill. As such, I ask for a favorable report.

Warmly,

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