

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 891 – Perinatal Mental Health Conditions

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 891. My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I serve as Director of Advocacy at EveryMind, a community-based mental health organization serving children, adults, and families across Maryland. EveryMind provides school-based mental health services, community-based care coordination, crisis prevention, and early intervention programs. We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Perinatal mental health disorders can have serious and lasting consequences for mothers, infants, and families. Twenty percent of women experience a perinatal mental health condition, yet 75% of those women never receive treatment. Even more alarming, mental health conditions are now the leading cause of maternal death, accounting for 22% of pregnancy-related deaths.

When maternal mental health conditions go untreated, the impact extends far beyond the individual mother. These conditions can disrupt the development of parent-child relationships and contribute to behavioral, cognitive, and emotional delays in children. The health of mothers and babies is inseparable. Supporting one directly supports the other.

Senate Bill 891 represents a critical opportunity to strengthen Maryland's response in a meaningful and lasting way. The bill implements the most impactful recommendations of the Task Force to Study Maternal Mental Health established by the General Assembly in 2015. It advances key goals outlined in the 2025 Maryland Maternal Health Improvement Plan, including improving screening, diagnosis, and treatment of behavioral health conditions in perinatal women and better preparing the workforce to respond.

Importantly, Maryland lags behind many other states in perinatal mental health care. According to the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, while Maryland received an overall "C" on its 2025 state report card, largely due to Medicaid expansion, it received an "F" for gaps in prenatal and postpartum screening rates and accountability. That grade reflects missed opportunities to identify and treat women who are struggling during one of the most vulnerable times in their lives.

Other states, including Minnesota, California, West Virginia, Virginia, and New York, have already enacted legislation to build stronger perinatal mental health systems. SB 891 would bring Maryland into alignment with these states and demonstrate our commitment to maternal and child health.

This legislation is about more than compliance or process. It is about saving lives. It is about ensuring that no mother suffers in silence and that no child's development is compromised because a parent could not access timely care.



By strengthening screening, improving workforce training, and building a more coordinated system of care, Senate Bill 891 would mark a critical step toward a comprehensive and robust perinatal mental health system in Maryland. It would improve the overall health and well-being of women and children across our state.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 891.

Thank you for your consideration.