

Testimony Concerning SB 891

“Health, Health Insurance, and Health Occupations – Perinatal Mental Health Conditions”

Submitted to the Senate Finance Committee

February 25, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

Joyce Harrison MD, Kennedy Krieger Institute, past president of the Infant Mental Health Association of Maryland and DC, strongly supports **SB 891 “Health, Health Insurance, and Health Occupations – Perinatal Mental Health Conditions.”** This bill requires screenings for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) by health providers at prenatal appointments and the post-partum visit as well as at each of the 7 well-child visits during a child’s first year of life. For a baby to be well supported and healthy, their parents need to be healthy, especially in terms of their mental health. SB 891 will ensure that parents suffering from PMADs can get the support they need.

As an infant and preschool child psychiatrist working closely with primary care pediatricians, I understand the critical role that a caregiver has in the health emotional development of the infant. Pediatricians are on the front lines in the early care of newborns and are best positioned to screen for and detect mental health issues in caregivers.

Perinatal mental health disorders can have serious adverse effects on the health and functioning of the mother, her infant and her family.

- 20% of women experience a perinatal mental health condition
- 75% of these women never receive treatment
- Perinatal mental health conditions are the leading cause of maternal death (22%)
- Maternal mental health conditions can disrupt the development of parent-child relationships
- Maternal mental health conditions can cause behavioral, cognitive, and emotional delays in a child

SB 891/HB 1118 would:

- Implement the most impactful recommendations of the *Task Force to Study Maternal Mental Health*, which was established by the General Assembly in 2015
- Bring Maryland into line with other states that have passed legislation similar to SB 891/HB 1118, including Minnesota, California, West Virginia, Virginia and New York

- Achieve some of the goals outlined in a *2025 Maryland Maternal Health Improvement Plan*, including improving the screening, diagnosis and treatment of behavioral health conditions in perinatal women, and better training the perinatal workforce to support women’s behavioral health

Maryland lags behind other states in perinatal mental health care:

- Every year the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health develops state report cards. While overall the 2025 report card gave Maryland a “C,” largely because of its Medicaid expansion, it gave Maryland an “F” for gaps in prenatal and postpartum screening rates and accountability.

SB 891/HB 1118 would improve the overall health and well-being of women and children, and it would mark a critical step in the development of a comprehensive and robust perinatal mental health system of care in Maryland. **We respectfully request that this committee issue a favorable report on SB 891 to ensure that Maryland’s parents have all the support they need to care for their babies.**

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