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

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly, Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Jacqueline Jones and I am a healthcare provider, friend, sister, and mother of two. I am testifying to urge you to vote in favor of Bill SB0891 which would increase coverage from certain insurers for screening for perinatal mental health condition, require the Maryland Department of Health to establish a perinatal mental health condition screening program and require health care providers to provide documentation that they have completed continuing education credit hours on perinatal mental health conditions in their renewal process.

In 2023, I was impacted by the loss of my friend, Andrea Kolbe, who committed suicide, the day after her 35th birthday, due to complications with postpartum psychosis. Her beautiful son, Harbor, was only three months old. Andrea's death is an overwhelming loss for her family, friends, husband, son, and the NY dance community. I wanted to share this story because I want to amplify the need for increased insurance coverage for screening for perinatal mental health conditions, training, referrals and follow up during the perinatal period. If Andrea had received adequate screening, referrals and follow-up, I truly believe she would still be here today.

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) impact a significant number of women during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Research suggests that roughly 8–25% of pregnant and postpartum individuals experience a PMAD, with differences in prevalence depending on the population studied and the screening tools applied. Waqas et al. (2022) Systematic review of mental health disorders among perinatal women reveals that early screening facilitates timely intervention and improves maternal and infant outcomes. Additionally, meta-analyses demonstrate that screening programs reduce perinatal depression (OR 0.55, 95% CI 0.45-0.66) and anxiety symptoms (SMD -0.18, 95% CI -0.25 to -0.12).

Perinatal women must receive prompt screening, follow-up care and providers should be equipped with training to provide optimal care to this patient population. According to the Maryland Maternal Mortality Review (MMR) 2022 Annual Report, “both the United States and Maryland MMR rates are increasing. These rates exceed the Healthy People 2030 goal of 15.7 deaths per 100,000 live births” (p.5). The MMR 2022 Annual Report, which reviews cases from 2020, reveals a total of 58 pregnancy-associated deaths, an increase of 27 deaths compared to 2019. Notably, “behavioral health conditions are the leading cause of all pregnancy-associated deaths, as well as pregnancy-related and non-pregnancy-related deaths” (p. 5). Among the “41 nonpregnancy-related deaths, two (5%) occurred within the first six days postpartum, one (2%) occurred between seven and 42 days postpartum, and 26 (63%) occurred between 43 and 365

days postpartum” (MMR 2022 Annual Report p. 13). This information underscores the fact that many of these deaths occur during the initial days to a year postpartum, emphasizing the need for proper screening and follow-up during the perinatal period.

On behalf of Andrea, all women with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, and their families, I express our gratitude for considering this impactful legislation.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Jones

References:

Health-General Article, §13-1212, Annotated Code of Maryland – 2022 Annual Report – Maryland Maternal Mortality Review. <https://Health.Maryland.gov/>. (2022). Retrieved February 25, 2026, from <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/Documents/MMR/2022%20MMR%20Report.pdf>

Thornton, M., & O’Conner, A. (2022). Pregnant and postpartum women and behavioral health integration [Topic brief]. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Integration Academy. <https://integrationacademy.ahrq.gov/products/topic-briefs/pregnant-postpartum-women>.

Waqas A, Koukab A, Meraj H, Dua T, Chowdhary N, Fatima B, Rahman A. Screening programs for common maternal mental health disorders among perinatal women: report of the systematic review of evidence. BMC Psychiatry. 2022 Jan 24;22(1):54. doi: 10.1186/s12888-022-03694-9. PMID: 35073867; PMCID: PMC8787899.