



WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 19

Maryland Commission on Women's Health Advancement – Establishment

January 27, 2026

Submitted by: Ashley Gresh, PhD, MSN, MA, RN, CNM, Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, Ashley.gresh@jhu.edu

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Distinguished Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 19, which would establish the Maryland Commission on Women's Health Advancement. I am a trained Public Health Nurse, Certified Nurse-Midwife and Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing with expertise in maternal and child health, and I write to express my enthusiastic support for this important legislation.

The Need for This Commission

Women in Maryland face significant and often unaddressed health challenges across their lifespans. Maternal mortality and morbidity rates remain unacceptably high, particularly among Black women and those in underserved communities. Healthcare gaps persist across the state, with many women lacking access to comprehensive, coordinated care that addresses their unique needs—from reproductive health to menopause and beyond. Senate Bill 19 represents a thoughtful, evidence-based approach to understanding and addressing these gaps.

Strengths of the Proposed Legislation

I commend Senator Ellis and the bill's sponsors for several key elements of this legislation:

1. **Comprehensive scope:** The Commission is charged with studying the feasibility of establishing both a State women's hospital in Southern Maryland and a statewide clinical network, ensuring that solutions address both centralized and distributed models of care.
2. **Diverse, expert membership:** The Commission's composition includes healthcare professionals across critical specialties—obstetrics, gynecology, urogynecology, maternal-fetal health, nurse midwifery, social work, and hospital systems—alongside patient advocates, health disparities experts from every region of the state, and representatives from academic institutions.

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3. **Focus on health equity:** By including representatives with expertise in racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic health disparities from across Maryland's regions, as well as a representative from the Maryland NAACP, this legislation centers equity in its approach to improving women's health.
4. **Flexibility in solutions:** The Commission is tasked not only with assessing a centralized hospital model but also with investigating alternative approaches, including hub networks that coordinate existing services across multiple locations or leverage existing infrastructure to improve women's access to care.
5. **Stakeholder engagement:** The requirement to consult with a broad range of stakeholders—including healthcare providers, patient advocates, and community organizations—will ensure that the Commission's recommendations are grounded in the lived experiences of Maryland women.
6. **Clear timeline and accountability:** The bill establishes clear reporting requirements, including an initial action plan by January 1, 2027, annual interim reports through 2032, and a final report with recommendations by December 1, 2032. This structure ensures transparency and sustained progress.

Conclusion Senate Bill 19 offers Maryland an opportunity to take a bold, comprehensive, and equity-centered approach to advancing women's health. By establishing the Maryland Commission on Women's Health Advancement, the state can systematically assess needs, identify gaps, and develop evidence-based solutions that will improve health outcomes for women across the lifespan.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 19.

Thank you for your leadership in advancing women's health in Maryland.

Please note, the views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the policies or positions of Johns Hopkins University or the Johns Hopkins Health System

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ashley Gresh".

Ashley Gresh, PhD, MSN, MA, RN, CNM
Assistant Professor
Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing
Email: Ashley.gresh@jhu.edu

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