

## Testimony Concerning HB 1118

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

Submitted to the House Health Committee

March 13, 2026

#### Position: SUPPORT

I support HB 1118 “**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. HB 1118 will ensure that parents suffering from PMADs can get the support they need.

I serve as executive project manager consultant of Family Connects Frederick County. Family Connects Frederick County, operated by Frederick Health Hospital, offers all Frederick County families with newborns a visit at home with a nurse at no charge. The nurse visits the family when the newborn is about three weeks old – bridging a gap in standard care for newborns and for mothers. The nurse does a comprehensive assessment of the newborn and family across 12 factors within the domains of health care, maternal health, infant care, and a safe home and environment. All our staff have been trained by Postpartum Support International and 7 out of 12 nurses are certified in perinatal mental health. Our nurses visited almost 4000 families with newborns between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2025.

Our nurses screen mothers for depression and anxiety and provide personalized referrals to support groups and mental health care resources that match the caregiver’s needs and insurance. Nurses can also provide referrals for partners who may be experiencing postpartum depression and anxiety symptoms.

As part of an independent evaluation of Family Connects Frederick County, American Institutes for Research recently conducted surveys of about 2,000 Frederick County families who delivered a newborn at Frederick Health within a prior 6-month period. With a 10% response rate, this survey showed that 72% of families with newborns experienced worry, doubt, hopelessness, or sadness within the first 12 weeks after giving birth. Eighty-eight percent of families who participated in a Family Connects visit with a nurse had their experience of worry, doubt, hopeless, and sadness during the newborn period addressed and were 18% more likely

to get their concerns met than nonparticipants. (Difference in needs being met between participants and nonparticipants was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ .)

Family Connects Frederick County is actively working on increasing capacity for perinatal mental health support in Frederick County. Not only have we trained our entire staff, but we have invested in 20 community stipends for doulas, mental health providers, lactation consultants, and community health workers across our community. When we surveyed participants in these trainings, we heard stories like this:

- I have a client that just gave birth. I noticed that she was working and going at a pace that was not typical of her. She then began to panic frequently about her baby not being ok, becoming tearful that she was not a good mother. I was able to meet this client where she was and explain to her it was ok to be overwhelmed. I walked her through the assessment in which we discovered she was experiencing some signs of postpartum depression. She got into her doctor and is now doing great.
- Recognizing potential risk and warning signs of a mother experiencing post partem paranoia, would normally have missed this, but was able to openly discuss and connect to more intensive in home resources to support mother and keep baby safe.
- Currently we have been able to use some of these tools to help especially our immigrant community who has been experiencing a lot of depression and anxiety.
- The updated pharmacology data was very helpful in reinforcing with a client that medication and therapy was an acceptable route for her during the 3rd trimester and her postpartum period to reduce the possibility of a repeat occurrence.

Screening is extremely important, as is a referral system that focuses specifically on the needs of postpartum families to make sure that identified needs can be met.

I recently served as vice-chair of the Maryland Workgroup on Newborn Home Visiting Services created through legislation signed by Governor Moore. We recently issued a final report called "A Strong Start for All Maryland Families," that calls for implementation of a universal + targeted system of home visiting for all Maryland families with newborns. The approach outlined in the report would help address the gaps in health care and social support that exist for families with newborns and make sure that referral systems are designed with them in mind.