

Testimony of Jessica Brady Reader in favor of SB 356

March 24, 2026

Imagine the joy and excitement as you await the arrival of a new baby. You buy an extra box of diapers just before your due date because you want to be prepared. You assemble the furniture. You cook and freeze meals. Then you go to a prenatal appointment in the final weeks of your pregnancy, your belly big, and you learn that the baby you were preparing for has inexplicably died.

Now imagine going to the hospital the next day, in shock. You still have to deliver this baby who will not come home with you. You are induced. You wait for labor to begin. You hear the cries of babies just born in other rooms. Your room is silent.

You deliver your precious child. You hold them, you pour all your love into them in the fleeting moments you spend together. Someone at the hospital asks you, hours after delivery, what are your plans for the body?

Your husband grabs his phone and searches for area funeral homes. You learn that a baby casket and cremation services cost hundreds or thousands of dollars. The stress you previously had about where to send your baby to daycare is now obliterated by the anguish of deciding where to send their body.

You come home in an empty car, sore and postpartum, with no baby. You unpack the dresser of swaddles and onesies. You donate the diapers. You can't bear to pack away the newly-purchased bassinet. It stays out for weeks as a reminder of that beautiful child you are grieving.

In 2021, this was my life and my nightmare. Our second daughter, Francesca, was stillborn at the end of a healthy pregnancy. Because she did not—could

not—take a breath outside the womb, in the eyes of the Maryland government, she was not a child even though she was perfect and beautiful and I held her in my arms. Had she taken just one breath in the hospital, that would have been different, which Maryland recognizes by making the parent eligible for a child tax credit for the year in which she was delivered. Instead, our reality was unrecognized by the state. The message is this—our experience, our baby, doesn't count.

Stillbirth parents grieve in silence. There is nothing we can do to bring our children back, but there is a lot you can do to support grieving parents by recognizing their loss. A good first step would be to join [the other states](#) that have moved in a bipartisan fashion to pass legislation to provide stillbirth parents a onetime tax credit, bringing equal treatment to parents who tragically lose their infants to stillbirth or due to other causes after birth.

In doing so, you can also raise awareness about a public health crisis that impacts 21,000 families each year, including more than 430 Maryland families.

I am grateful that the Maryland Senate so quickly and convincingly passed SB 356, the stillbirth tax credit bill. I am asking members of the House to do the same. Make Maryland the next state to support stillbirth families. Thank you.