

Re: March 2026

### SB0356 Stillbirth Tax Credit

Hello, my name is Corinne Heiliger and my family and I live in Columbia, Maryland. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be here today to share a bit of my daughter's story and ask you to pass the proposed Stillbirth tax credit for Maryland.

In September of 2014 I was 9 months pregnant with my 3rd daughter. We went through months of fertility treatments to conceive this much desired child to complete our family. Our girls Ella, 9, and Sadie, 4, eagerly awaited their new little sister even creating a countdown calendar where they marked off each day until my scheduled C-section date when baby sister would arrive. 5 days before my C-section with the nursery decorated, infant seat ready in the car, and all of us buzzing with anticipation, we got the worst news of our lives. Unable to find a heartbeat in a routine check, I rushed to the hospital while my husband dropped the kids off with his sister.

Within minutes, I was put in a tiny room with a huge ultrasound machine and my husband rushed in just as we heard the words so many of us in the stillbirth loss community remember so well "I'm sorry, there is no heartbeat." Laying there full term, with an enormous belly where I'd felt movement for months, this felt unthinkable, inscrutable, impossible. The tone in the room changed quickly as techs scurried out, nurses looked at each other uncomfortably and they began to try to answer our questions about what happens next in this shocking circumstance.

Later that evening, our daughter Clara Louise, was delivered in a deafeningly quiet Operating Room, the silence punctuated only by the occasional snuffles of crying nurses and the brutal sounds of medical equipment. Clara was 8lbs 1oz, beautiful, but dead. No cause of death was ever discovered.

Going home with an empty car seat a few days later caused an ache I wasn't sure I'd survive.

As the reality hit of needing to bury our baby and choose a tiny coffin and cemetery and gravestone, friends started a gofundme to help with these completely unexpected costs.

The last thing a grieving family should have to worry about is money to cremate or bury their child. The pain of a loss like this felt absolutely unbearable and adding financial pressures due to unexpected costs and lost time at work only exacerbates the stress and suffering.

A tax credit in Maryland would be something hospitals and cemeteries could make bereaved families aware of right away so they know there will be some financial help in the coming year. However, I think the most important thing passing this bill would accomplish is sending a clear and powerful message to every family who will face this horrible circumstance in coming years, that **their child counted**. Right now, thousands of us in Maryland face the triggering experience every single year of filling out the names and birthdates of our living children if we have any, and being reminded of our child who died, whose name isn't listed. This tax credit

would provide a one time financial benefit but would also, at least in the year of their birth, acknowledge that this person was here. These children were very real and very loved and are very missed.

I was working as a psychotherapist specializing in trauma when Clara died. I had to take 6 months off of work to process and grieve before I felt confident I could sit with clients again and truly be present for their traumas, not crying about my own. I have since pursued specialized training in grief and perinatal loss and regularly work with clients who have experienced pregnancy and infant loss and lead support groups for women of color like myself, who have losses at double the rate.

I know personally and see in my work daily, how devastating it is to lose a child. These “out of order” losses when a child dies before a parent, feel deeply unnatural and the suffering is often traumatic, complex, and has profound, enduring effects. This tax credit won’t take that away, but this is an opportunity to accomplish something that could help acknowledge the needs and the pain of an often silent group of your constituents. Please do what you can to draw attention and a benefit to those who have already lost so much.

Thank you.

Corinne Heiliger

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