



**2020 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: HB 837 – Public Health – Maternal Mortality and Morbidity – Implicit Bias Training and Study

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support

BILL ANALYSIS: HB 837 would require implicit bias training, particularly tailored to perinatal care, for all health care professionals working in hospital and newborn units and free-standing birthing centers.

POSITION

RATIONALE: The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) submits a **letter of support for HB 837**, as its sponsors aim to reduce unacceptable disparities in Maryland’s maternal and infant mortality rates.

Despite the great strides in medical care over the past century, maternal and infant mortality remain unacceptably high in the U.S. While Maryland maternal mortality rates for white women are close to the Healthy People 2020 target, rates for African American women are almost 4-times higher.¹ Approximately 75% of these maternal deaths were judged to have been preventable by the Maryland Maternal Mortality Review Committee’s most recent report.¹ Maryland ranks 33rd among states in infant mortality rate.² This low ranking is primarily due to the disparity between African American and Caucasian mortality rates.

Decreasing disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes hinges on communication and trust relationships between patients and health care providers. Particularly in the fields of pregnancy and newborn care, cultural beliefs and practices impact access to care, evaluation of health concerns, treatment recommendations, and patient compliance.

The training mandated by HB 837 addresses critical areas of unintended bias that continue to hamper important health care interactions. In turn, physicians and nurses who are more sensitive to patients’ cultural needs can provide more effective care, reducing health disparities and health care costs driven by preventable maternal complications and preterm births.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this **letter of support for HB 837** and applauds the efforts of Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, Chair Pendergrass, and the other 35 sponsors for coming together and backing this important piece of legislation. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-614-6891. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*

1 <http://healthymaryland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Health-General-Article-§13-1207-2018-Annual-Report-Maryland-Maternal-Mortality-Review.pdf>

2 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/infant_mortality_rates/infant_mortality.htm