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HB 1349 / SB 777 -Public Health – Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program Fund

Position: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of House Bill 1349 / Senate Bill 777. This bill provides enhanced grant funding and expanded eligibility under the Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program Fund. The bill requires the Program Fund to award this enhanced funding to Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), hospitals, and providers of prenatal care that propose a program to provide and promote prenatal care to women who would otherwise not receive such care, including women who cannot obtain prenatal care due to their immigration status.

As part of our mission, CareFirst is committed to driving transformation of the healthcare experience with and for our members and communities, with a focus on quality, equity, affordability, and access to care. Racial and ethnic minorities in traditionally underserved communities experience significant disparities in maternal/child health (MCH) outcomes due to lack of access to care, especially prenatal care. To combat these disparities, we strongly support House Bill 1349 / Senate Bill 777, which would provide necessary funding and resources to FQHCs, hospitals, and providers that provide direct healthcare services to these underserved communities, strengthen access to prenatal care, and ultimately improve health outcomes for women who would otherwise not receive needed prenatal care. We believe this bill presents a promising policy solution to reduce MCH disparities in the state.

CareFirst, along with the BlueCross BlueShield Association and other Blues plans, are committed to support and partner with stakeholders to reduce disparities in MCH outcomes. CareFirst supported the inclusion of MCH as the third population health focus area under the state Total Cost of Care Model's Statewide Integrated Health Improvement Strategy. CareFirst has also made significant investment in Maryland and regionwide to improve MCH and reduce outcome disparities:

- Since 2009, CareFirst has invested more than \$20 million to support MCH efforts in Maryland, D.C., and Northern Virginia.
- In Baltimore City, CareFirst has provided more than \$10 million since 2009 to support the B'more for Healthy Babies Initiative. Through services like home visiting, central intake/triage, between 2009 and 2018, the initiative resulted in:
 - 15-30% decrease in infant mortality rate;
 - 71% decrease in sleep-related infant deaths; and
 - 75% decrease in teen birth rate.
- In 2018, CareFirst supported key MCH programming in Anne Arundel County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, St. Mary's County, and Wicomico County. A few examples include:
 - Anne Arundel Medical Center Foundation, \$100,000 to support staff training, doula services, and prenatal care;
 - Chesapeake Health Care, \$250,000 to expand obstetrical services addressing prenatal care and substance use services to more than 3,000 patients on Maryland's Eastern Shore;
 - Mary's Center, \$200,000 to expand prenatal care including group care prenatal services, substance use services and postpartum depression treatment to mothers in Prince George's County; and
 - Prince George's County Health Department, \$150,000 to expand prenatal care, home visits, and breastfeeding consultative services.

- In 2019, CareFirst released additional funding to support programming that expands access to care, organizes community resources, supports expectant mothers, and addresses factors that contribute to premature births, low birth weight, infant mortality, and unsafe sleep.

CareFirst enthusiastically supports the policy goals advanced by House Bill 1349 / Senate Bill 777. We look forward to partnering with legislators, health departments, public health groups, and other stakeholders to advance health equity, as we continue to deploy and invest in targeted strategies outside and within our own organization to ensure the health and wellbeing of our members and communities.

We urge a favorable report.

About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield

In its 83rd year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit healthcare company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to 3.4 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. In 2019, CareFirst invested \$43 million to improve overall health, and increase the accessibility, affordability, safety, and quality of healthcare throughout its market areas. To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at www.carefirst.com and our transforming healthcare page at www.carefirst.com/transformation, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).