

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chairman  
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Elizabeth A. Hafey, Esq.  
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Thank you for the opportunity to express Johns Hopkins University and Medicine's support for SB777, Public Health - Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program Fund. This legislation, consistent with recommendations from the Report on Senate President's Workgroup on Equity and Inclusion and the 2020 Task Force on Maryland Maternal and Child Health, takes meaningful action and provides increased funding to address Maryland's high rates of maternal and infant mortality, particularly amongst women and babies of color.

Specifically, the legislation will provide critical prenatal care services to underinsured and uninsured women by restructuring the Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Coordination Services Grant Program Fund into the Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program (Program) and will dedicate \$1.1M in FY23, \$2.1M in FY24, and \$3.1M in FY25 for the Program. SB777 will also expand access to healthcare for mothers whose citizenship status and lack of health insurance often prevents them from seeking prenatal care, thereby exacerbating the risk of poor outcomes for themselves and their babies.

The Program may award grants to Federally Qualified Health Centers, hospitals, county health departments and other providers. Priorities will be given to entities that propose to serve communities that have a high number of births to women enrolled in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, high rates of infant mortality, and high rates of preterm births. There is also a provision to award grants to those proposals that increase accessibility to prenatal care in communities with members who would otherwise not receive prenatal care, including women who cannot obtain prenatal care due to their immigration status.

SB777 is especially timely as the urgent need to address health disparities is now more apparent than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the fact that Maryland Black and Latinx communities bear an undeserved burden of racial, economic, and health disparities. According to the CDC, Maryland's 2013 to 2017 maternal mortality rate of 24.8 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births ranks 22nd among states. The maternal mortality rate for African American mothers is almost four times that of White mothers. For infant and neonatal mortality, Maryland ranks 35th and 39th among states, respectively, significantly higher than the national rate.

This legislation provides a significant opportunity to turn the tide in the battle against health inequities and particularly Maryland's mothers and children. All Marylanders deserve access to high-quality, affordable health care. Johns Hopkins applauds the leadership of the General Assembly and the sponsors of this legislation for recognizing the critical need to address this issue; **we urge a favorable report on SB777.**

cc: Senator Sarah Elfreth  
Members of Senate Budget and Taxation Committee