



SB778 – SUPPORT

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Healthy Babies Equity Act

Health and Government Operations Committee

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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Laura Atwood. I have lived in Maryland since 1999, and I represent Takoma Park Mobilization, an advocacy organization with a following of over 2500 people, active in environmental, justice, economic, and electoral matters. We are in SUPPORT of SB778.

I'm also testifying as an individual who does volunteer work in immigrant communities; and as a healthcare employee who's so often struck by how many health problems, with accompanying anguish and multidimensional costs, could be prevented.

I'd like to share a personal story with a happy ending – an ending we have the power to give to more people. A while back, I accompanied a young woman (I'll call Maria) to a 5-month ultrasound appointment at a clinic. It was her first prenatal test, and a volunteer organization (an offshoot of Takoma Park Mobilization) covered the cost through donations. Maria had crossed the border pregnant and with a toddler, and she didn't ever talk about her past. In chatting, she asked if I have kids, and I mentioned my then-18-year-old daughter and told what she was doing. She said softly, "I'm also 18..." and we were quiet.

Fast-forward, she went for continued prenatal appointments and the baby was found to be low-weight, with concerns of maternal malnutrition. People rallied around Maria, she gained weight and started just looking better, and she gave birth with her landlady by her side. I was honored to be invited to the baby's 1st birthday barbecue. Maria and her sons now have a community, the two kids look healthy (and very cute!), and she has a steady restaurant job and loving babysitter. Through coincidence to get time-sensitive support, plus her own pretty remarkable survival skills, she and her sons are now doing really well.

But too many of her counterparts don't stumble upon scarce but needed support and healthcare – this support has to be at a systems level. With this bill, we can help make it happen.

Takoma Park Mobilization urges a favorable report on SB778.