

SB0778, Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Children and Pregnant Women (Healthy Babies Equity Act)

Testimony in **Support**

To: Chair Kelley and members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Arielle Juberg, Baltimore, MD 21234

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) in Baltimore. SURJ is working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland. I am testifying in **support** of SB0778, Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Children and Pregnant Women (Healthy Babies Equity Act).

SB0778 is important to me because every child deserves a healthy start to life. As I drive around Baltimore, I see billboards and advertisements encouraging parents to take their children for back-to-school check-ups, vaccine visits, and well-baby appointments. Yet we are excluding a group of children from the Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) simply because of their immigration status. An infant or five year old has no control over their immigration status. Excluding children from medical care because of their immigration status is a cruel and irrational punishment.

This bill will also ensure that all pregnant people in Maryland can access prenatal care. With this bill, Maryland has the chance to join 17 states, plus New York City and the District of Columbia, in recognizing that the health of pregnant people is more important than immigration status. The need in Maryland is critical, since 1 in 14 infants in Maryland is born to a person receiving no prenatal care, and babies whose mothers did not receive prenatal care are three times more likely to have low birth weight and have birth complications. Black and Latina mothers are particularly at risk, since they have higher rates of uninsurance compared to their white counterparts. Making prenatal care available to those who cannot afford it can result in lower maternal mortality and healthier babies.

Children with untreated conditions, sickly infants, women who die after childbirth – these are the human costs of our current system. Why do we accept these outcomes? Healthy kids are more likely to grow into healthy adults, which makes applying MCHP to all kids a wise public policy; but more than that, making sure Maryland's kids get health care regardless of where they were born or who their parents are is a matter of basic human decency. Likewise, no pregnant person or newborn should face the risk of injury or death because they don't fall into a narrow window of immigration eligibility set by federal law. *It is Maryland's longstanding public policy that kids shouldn't go without healthcare just because their families can't afford it: this bill recognized that children of immigrant parents deserve the same treatment as any other child.*

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **support** SB0778. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service.