

**Committee:** House Health and Government Operations Committee

**Bill Number:** HB 119 - Public Health: Giving Infants a Future Without Transmission Act

**Hearing Date:** February 7, 2024

**Position:** Support with Amendments

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The Women's Law Center of Maryland supports the public health intention of *House Bill 119 – Public Health – Giving Infants a Future Without Transmission (GIFT) Act*. We understand that our public health officials need to be actively engaged with the health care provider community to reduce the perinatal transmission of HIV.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland provides legal services to support individuals facing intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, or human trafficking. We do not provide healthcare services, and defer to our health professional colleagues on the question of appropriate clinical protocols for HIV testing to reduce the perinatal transmission of HIV. We would like to raise two separate policy questions that could be addressed by amendments:

- **More Appropriate References to the Pregnant Person:** We object to the language on page 6 in line 7 about that the HIV testing is to:

“(1) THE BODY OF A PREGNANT WOMAN DURING DELIVERY;”

The use of the word “BODY” is inappropriate, as it does not acknowledge that the pregnant individual is a person. We would also note that the bill consistently uses the term “woman” and does not acknowledge that some pregnant individuals may not identify as women.

- **Report of Pregnancy Status:** We appreciate that the Department's plans to use pregnancy status reports to support public health interventions to curb perinatal transmission of HIV. Such intervention may yield positive health outcomes. However, we believe there may be other avenues to further this goal. We unfortunately live in an environment where people may be intimidated by the collection and reporting of such data.

We would like to thank the Department for its commitment to improving the health of pregnant people and newborns. We would be pleased to work with the Department, the Committee, and other stakeholders on amendments to address the questions we have raised, yet still ensure that the legislation allows the Department of Health to take an effective public health approach to reducing perinatal transmission of HIV and syphilis. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Robyn Elliott at [relliott@policypartners.net](mailto:relliott@policypartners.net).

**The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.**