



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 356

Maternal Mortality Review Program - Reporting Requirement

TO: Chair Kelley, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore
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Family League of Baltimore (Family League) supports Senate Bill 356, Maternal Mortality Review Program - Reporting Requirement. This bill would strengthen the annual report regarding the Maternal Mortality Review Program by including a comprehensive section on racial disparities that includes a comparison of the maternal mortality rates across race and ethnicity.

Nationally, Black women have a maternal mortality rate that is more than 2.5 times that of White women, but that disparity is higher in Maryland at 2.74 times.¹ Risk of maternal mortality seems to be exacerbated by race, age, and residence in rural and high-poverty communities.² Through our work as a convener in the B'More for Healthy Babies strategy, we have focused our work on reversing the deep racial disparity in infant mortality rates across Baltimore City. There is a strong connection between the racial disparity in infant mortality and the racial disparity in maternal mortality.

Given the disparate rates of maternal deaths shown by the data, research tells us that the causes of this disparity are deeper than race, economic or education status. For instance, Black women with a college education have a higher infant mortality rate than White women with less than a high school education. As such, racial disparities in maternal health outcomes are likely not to be attributed to race itself, but to systemic social and economic forces which institutionalize racism in the development and health of women of color, Black women in particular.³ The impacts of structural racism can have demonstrable impacts on the physiological wellbeing of pregnant women, increasing levels of stress and, in turn, cortisol. These raised stress hormones can disrupt immune, vascular, metabolic, and endocrine systems, and cause cells to age more quickly.⁴

In short - it is the prolonged and sustained exposure to racism that threatens the lives of African American women and infants in Maryland.

As the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore, Family League's mission is to serve as an architect of change in by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create

¹ Maryland Maternal Mortality Review (2017). *Annual Report*. Maryland Department of Health http://healthymaryland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MMR-Report-2017_FINAL.pdf

² World Health Organization (2018). *Maternal Mortality Fact Sheet*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

³ Center for American Progress (2018). *Exploring African Americans' High Maternal and Infant Death Rates*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/02/01/445576/exploring-african-americans-high-maternal-infant-death-rates/>

⁴ Carpenter, Z. (2018). What's Killing America's Black Infants? <https://www.thenation.com/article/whats-killing-americas-black-infants/>

lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. This work is guided by the State's 8 Child Well-being Results Areas. We support SB 356 in particular due to its alignment with these result areas by working to ensure that "Babies are Born Healthy" and "Children are Healthy."⁵

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⁵ Maryland Governor's Office for Children. "Maryland's Child Well-Being Scorecard." <https://goc.maryland.gov/reportcard/>