



HB1349 Public Health – Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program Fund

Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee
March 19, 2021 1:30 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee to **issue a favorable report on HB1349 Public Health – Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program**, sponsored by Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We strive to ensure every individual has the freedom to decide if, when, and how to form their families, and to parent with dignity, in safety, and in good health. In doing so, we recognize the importance of programs dedicated to ensuring that all pregnant people can get the health care they need in order to experience safe and positive pregnancy and birth outcomes.

Affordable, comprehensive prenatal care is critical to ensuring healthy and stable Maryland families. We believe that extending the funds of the Maryland Prenatal and Infant Care Grant Program Fund to federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), hospitals, and providers of prenatal care will foster positive health outcomes in our state. Undocumented individuals are much less likely than the general U.S. population to receive adequate prenatal care,¹ and have higher rates of complications during labor.² This is likely the reason why undocumented foreign born Latinx individuals report lower birth weights (LBW) compared to their documented foreign-born Latinx counterparts, as well as other negative health outcomes.

Under HB1349, competitive grants would be awarded to qualified health centers, hospitals, and providers of prenatal care in communities with members who would otherwise not receive pre-natal care including women who cannot obtain prenatal care due to their immigration status. While most U.S.-born low-income women are eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) during pregnancy, there are still too many who fall through the cracks of the system in obtaining any form of healthcare coverage, and it is extremely difficult for undocumented people to access comprehensive federal- and state-regulated health insurance. Considering these limitations, FQHCs play an essential role in providing healthcare to the nation's most vulnerable populations. By including women who cannot obtain prenatal care due to their immigration status in HB1349, we can ensure that future American citizens will have a lower incidence of low birthweight, preterm birth, being small for gestational age, and infant death.

Access to quality and affordable health care is a basic right that all people deserve to enjoy regardless of immigration status. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on HB1349**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Korinek K, Smith KR. Prenatal care among immigrant and racial-ethnic minority women in a new immigrant destination: exploring the impact of immigrant legal status. *Soc Sci Med.* 2011;72(10):1695-1703.

² *AMA J Ethics.* 2019;21(1):E93-99. doi: 10.1001/amajethics.2019.93.