

THE GENERAL COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Witness before the

Joint Committee on Public Health

MOTHER Lab

April 29, 2021

Re: Support H.2371/H.2312/S.1474: An Act relative to conducting fetal and infant mortality review

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Decker, Chairwoman Comerford, Vice-Chairwoman Moran, Vice-Chairman Murray.

We are representatives and members of Maternal Outcomes for Translational Health Equity Research (M.O.T.H.E.R) Lab. It is an exceptional honor to submit a testimony for such a distinguished panel and such an important cause. On behalf of the MOTHER Lab, we want to thank the Members of this Joint Committee for the sustained support on the public health front and for having this hearing today. Additionally, we want to thank Representatives Liz Miranda of Boston and Flucker Oakley of Boston for proposing Bill H.2371/H.2312/S.1474: *An Act relative to conducting fetal and infant mortality review*.

MOTHER lab's mission is to "address and eradicate inequities Black women face, through research, advocacy, and mentorship by confronting and dismantling the system that enables and perpetuates racism for Black women who give birth." [1] As most of us call Massachusetts our home, we engage with the community and stay abreast of policy on maternal health. We are writing to express clear support of the proposed Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR).

According to the Boston Public Health Commission, "Massachusetts has an Infant Mortality Rate of 4.2 deaths per thousand live births, the lowest in the country"[2]. However, it does not tell the whole story, as everyone is not impacted equally. People who come from low-income communities and people of color have disproportionate infant mortality rates, the rates per thousand live births for the Hispanic Massachusetts community being 5.6, and the Black Massachusetts community being 7.1 [2]. We simply cannot allow this disparity to persist.

The proposed bill would authorize, not require, the local department of public health to conduct thorough reviews of each infant and fetal death occurring within their jurisdiction. This review would

provide background information on possible health determinants. Building solutions to this infant death disparity crisis starts with a complete and inclusive look at the underlying and systematic factors impacting the Massachusetts community and forming data-driven public health policy programs.

The FIMR gives the public health department the top-level perspective with the medical and state records, and the delicate and personal data from surveys collected by clinical experts through in-home meetings with mothers following the infant death. A fetal loss is a horrible tragedy that impacts the entire family, and the FIMR would be the first step in eradicating this experience in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts has made significant advances in reducing the overall rate of infant death, but this issue is far from solved and requires continued efforts. We are enormously grateful for the opportunity to raise awareness on this inequitable issue. We have brought light to the present issue: racial and socioeconomic infant death disparities, and a way forward: instating a statewide FIMR process to reduce this infant death rate. Massachusetts is at a critical juncture, with the opportunity to intervene and address this issue. Continued dedication to eradicating the preventable loss of infant life can and will help propel us into a more equitable and just Massachusetts.

Thank you, Chairwoman Decker, Chairwoman Comerford, Vice-Chairwoman Moran, Vice-Chairman Murray, and Members of the Committee.

Signed,

MOTHER Lab

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[1] “M.O.T.H.E.R. Lab Mission.” Maternal Outcomes for Translational Health Equity Research (M.O.T.H.E.R.) Lab, last modified in 2020, <https://motherlab.org/about-2/>

[2] “FIMR Fact Sheet.”

<https://bphc.org/whatwedo/childrens-health/boston-healthy-start-initiative/PublishingImages/Pages/Community-Action-Network/FIMR%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>