

February 18, 2025

TO: Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health  
FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon  
SUBJECT: Support for SB 691

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Grace Fortson, I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager with Our Children Oregon (OCO). OCO is a statewide nonprofit committed to whole child wellbeing through the Children's Agenda- a comprehensive legislative agenda created and supported by our over 135 member organizations across the state.

I am here to represent not only my own personal support of Momnibus, but also the support of our entire Children's Agenda coalition who voted to prioritize this bill as a key way to support children and families this legislative session.

To give broader context for these conversations, Oregon's maternal mortality rates have more than doubled from 1999-2019<sup>1</sup>. During this period, the maternal death rate increased 168% among American Indians and Alaska Natives. For pregnant Black people, the maternal death rate increased 58% in the same time. In looking at data from the 2018-2020, the CDC found that rates increased with age of the pregnant person<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.opb.org/article/2023/09/06/maternal-death-rates-doubled-in-oregon-and-rose-even-higher-across-the-us-over-a-20-year-period/#:~:text=Maternal%20mortality%20rates%20in%20Oregon,talk%20with%20co%2Dauthor%20Dr.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2020/maternal-mortality-rates-2020.htm#print>

Unfortunately, 41% of deaths of pregnancy-related deaths were attributed to underlying cause of mental health conditions. 57% of those deaths were specifically attributed to substance use disorder<sup>3</sup>.

Mental health conditions for pregnant/postpartum people are not only risk factors for maternal death, they also impact children in the home. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as family substance use, mean worse outcomes (namely health and education) for our children<sup>4</sup>. Improving mental health support for parents reduces risk of abuse and neglect which in turn reduces the risk of children needing child welfare involvement.

The current gaps in mental health care for pregnant and postpartum people are costing us lives. **We urge you to vote yes on SB 691 to start saving lives and improving child outcomes.**

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Our Children Oregon

View the [2025 Children's Agenda](#)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/DATAREPORTS/MCHTITLEV/Documents/January2023BiennialReportMMRCFinal.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8882933/>