

February 18, 2025

TO: Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon
SUBJECT: Support for SB 692

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.

Before I share some data, I'd like to share a personal story. My older sister has two children. I was present for both births. As a highschooler attending the first birth, I didn't understand everyone's nerves the same way I did last year. My sister is black. The nerves were not only for a smooth and healthy birth, they stemmed from the explicit conversations pregnant Black people have with their family before births. The message is tragically all too clear: "Don't let them let me die." Maternal mortality rates are results of policy decisions like this bill.

To give broader context for these conversations, Oregon's maternal mortality

rates have more than doubled from 1999–2019¹. 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.

Doulas and culturally specific care are both key recommendations from the 2023 Oregon Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (p.5). In reviewing pregnancy-related deaths from 2018–2020, the same committee found that discrimination either certainly was or probably was a contributing factor to death (p.19). Therefore, culturally responsive care is critical in reducing preventable pregnancy-related deaths.

While these numbers are not inspiring, at least 53% of all pregnancy-related deaths are preventable. Looking at pregnancy related deaths from 2017 to 2019, around 80% were preventable². **We urge you to support SB 692 and start preventing these deaths today.**

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Our Children Oregon

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

¹<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.>

²<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/DATAREPORTS/MCHTITLEV/Documents/January2023BiennialReportMMRCFinal.pdf>