

March 25, 2025

TO: Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon

SUBJECT: Support for SB 690

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. SB 690 is imperative in our collective work toward a healthier Oregon as it will generate much needed data to ground our strategies. With the completion of the OHA study on perinatal health, we will be better equipped to make informed choices about how to best address the needs of our population.

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. In looking at data from the 2018–2020, the CDC found that rates increased with age of the pregnant person². It is imperative to have improved support as people are having children at higher ages with more frequency.

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 preventable³. **I urge you to support SB 693** so we can start improving outcomes for parents and children through data driven approaches.

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Our Children Oregon

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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.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2020/maternal-mortality-rates-2020.htm#print>

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