



March 31, 2025

Senator Melissa Wiklund
Chair of the Minnesota Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue West, Room 2107
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Improving Maternal and Child Health Outcomes For African American Mothers and Babies (Senate File 1691)

It is with great enthusiasm that we share our support for Senate File 1691 which appropriates \$1 million from the General Fund for a grant to the Birth Justice Collaborative. This critical investment will strengthen the African American-focused Homeplace model in Hennepin County, which aims at improving maternal and child health outcomes. We're grateful to this Committee for prioritizing the health and well-being of African American mothers from pregnancy through the postpartum period and ensuring that African American babies have a healthy start.

Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota (CDF-MN) advocates for policies and programs that improve the well-being of children and increase the economic security of families. We focus particular attention to Minnesota children who have been pushed to the margins – children living in poverty, Black children, Indigenous children, children from communities of color, and children living with disabilities. CDF-MN works to dismantle systemic barriers and address disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized children and communities.

Minnesota has serious disparities in maternal health and birth outcomes for mothers, babies, and families of color. A healthy baby starts with a healthy pregnant mother. In order to have a healthy pregnancy and positive birth outcomes, women and their babies must have access to culturally-centered and affirming care before, during, and after birth. Many African American mothers and families encounter systemic barriers to accessing quality maternal care, leading to significant disparities in health outcomes for themselves and their babies. **During 2023, the rate of low-birth weight babies born to Black mothers (13%) in Minnesota was nearly twice the rate of low-birth weight babies born to White mothers (7%).** Low-birth weight is a preventable public health issue and an important determinant of child survival, healthy development, and long-term outcomes. Preventing preterm births is one of the best ways to prevent babies born with low-birth weight, and regular prenatal care is the best way to prevent preterm births and babies born with low-birth weight. We see even greater disparities in deaths among infants under one year old. **The infant mortality rate among babies born to Black mothers in Minnesota was 2.3 times the state rate.**

The health of Minnesota mothers is a key indicator of our State's overall health. In 2022, the Minnesota Department of Health released its first-ever report on maternal mortality in Minnesota, *Minnesota Maternal Mortality Update: Reporting For 2017-2019*. The Report showed that Minnesota's overall maternal mortality rate was much lower than the national average. However, it also documented stark disparities in mortality among Black Minnesota mothers. **Black mothers represented 13% of the birthing population, but made up 27% of pregnancy-associated deaths. Research suggests that many of these mothers' deaths (80%) could have been prevented.**

By providing culturally-centered care, healing, and support for African American mothers and families from pregnancy through the postpartum period, the holistic Homeplace model delivers essential care while addressing racial disparities in maternal and infant health. We believe this model will help reduce maternal health disparities and provide a meaningful framework that can be replicated throughout Minnesota.

We urge you to support Senate File 1691 and invest in the health and well-being of African American mothers and babies. All pregnant mothers in Minnesota should have the opportunity to experience healthy pregnancies and childbirth, and all babies should have healthy beginnings! Thank you for placing the well-being of children and families at the center of your discussions and decision-making. We're grateful for your service!

Together For Children,

/s/ Alisha Porter
State Director

/s/ Alexandra Fitzsimmons, Esq.
Senior Policy Director