

February 18, 2025

TO: Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon

SUBJECT: Support for SB 693

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 1999–2019<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>. 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 preventable<sup>3</sup>. **I urge you to support SB 693 and start preventing these deaths today** through creating this much needed Task Force.

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Our Children Oregon

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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>

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