

Circle Up: United Methodist Women for Moms

**Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
HB 133
Testimony of Circle Up, United Methodist Women
May 19, 2021**

Circle Up would like to offer its support in favor of Representative Rose's HB 133. Circle Up is an organization of First United Methodist Church of Austin and is affiliated with the larger United Methodist Women organization. United Methodist Women is the largest denominational faith organization for women with approximately 800,000 members worldwide. Ensuring proper health care for women is at the heart of the United Methodist Women's organizational purpose and has been since the organization was founded in the 1800s. It is for this reason that Circle Up is pleased to offer this testimony, as mothers and women of faith, in support of Representative Toni Rose's House Bill 133, a bill that would allow certain women in Texas to maintain comprehensive health coverage through Medicaid for a full year following pregnancy.

Maternal health issues remain an area of urgent concern in Texas. In its most recent biennial report, the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee found that nine out of ten pregnancy-related deaths were preventable.¹ To address these concerning statistics, it is critical to ensure that all women have access to timely and appropriate health care at all stages of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum care. Currently, Medicaid covers a significant percentage of births in our state but only provides postpartum coverage for 60 days following delivery. Yet the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee found that one-third of maternal deaths occurred 43 days to one year after pregnancy, frequently after a woman has lost access to Medicaid insurance.² Moreover, many Texas mothers face severe complications in the year following pregnancy that may not ultimately result in death, such as postpartum depression, hemorrhage, infection, or a cardiac event. When Texas women become uninsured 60 days after pregnancy, they may only have access to the state's new Healthy Texas Women Plus program. While Healthy Texas Women Plus does offer some valuable health services to women in Texas, it does not cover many other necessary items including a broad prescription drug benefit, surgical care, hospital inpatient or outpatient care, or physical therapies. Healthy Texas Women Plus also currently has essentially no network of specialty or mental health providers to deliver covered services. As such, many Texan mothers are left with no access to the vital health care services they need, and deaths that could otherwise have been prevented continue to occur.

Under the current health program structure, many Texas mothers are left with no access to valuable mental health services in the year following pregnancy, resulting in a loss to both their

¹ Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report. (Dec. 2020).

² *Id.*



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families and the state of Texas. Notably, maternal mental health conditions such as postpartum depression are one of the most common complications of pregnancy, affecting one in seven Texas moms.³ Untreated postpartum depression harms a child's health, brain development, and school readiness. A recent report found that failing to treat maternal mental health conditions costs Texas \$2.2 billion for one year of births due to productivity losses, child and behavioral and developmental disorders, maternal health expenditures, and preterm births.⁴

It is perhaps most compelling to note that the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee identified increasing access to comprehensive health services as their top recommendation for improvements to maternal health.⁵ The Review Committee recommended increasing access to such comprehensive care during pregnancy, the year after pregnancy, and throughout the preconception and interpregnancy periods. HB 133 would help achieve exactly this recommendation by allowing Texas mothers to have access to the comprehensive health coverage available through Medicaid for a full year after pregnancy.

The members of Circle Up believe strongly that the passage of House Bill 133 could save the lives of countless Texas mothers. We are not only here as mothers ourselves to testify in support of this bill, but as Christians. Our faith calls us to speak out on behalf of the countless preventable maternal deaths happening in Texas. As the Bible directs, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."⁶ We sincerely appreciate Chair Kolkhorst's sponsorship of this bill. Chair Kolkhorst has been a leader on maternal health policy, working tirelessly on the Healthy Texas Women Plus program and other efforts. Because of this, we feel Chair Kolkhorst is well-suited to champion this bill in the Senate and shepherd this critical legislation through the rest of the process. As noted, the Healthy Texas Women and Healthy Texas Women Plus programs took important steps in protecting the health of mothers across Texas, and this is a chance to take another important step to address some of the remaining maternal health challenges facing new moms. We urge the members of this committee to join us in working to prioritize the health of all mothers in this state and support HB 133.

Respectfully submitted,

The Members of Circle Up, United Methodist Women

³ Texas Health and Human Services Commission. Rider 85 Report: Postpartum Depression Among Women Utilizing Texas Medicaid. (Feb 2019) (citing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) combined CY 2014-2016 data).

⁴ Mathematica. "Untreated Maternal Health Conditions in Texas: Costs to Society and Medicaid." (March 2020).

⁵ Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report. (Dec. 2020).

⁶ Galatians 6:2

