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Oppose House Bill 1456 – Don’t punish pregnant women

House Bill 1456 authorizes a local child-protective services department to perform an investigation or family assessment for child abuse or neglect in response to a report or complaint that a pregnant woman is using a controlled substance.

This bill prevents women from seeking or receiving the healthcare they need. We all want to promote healthy pregnancies and provide pregnant women working to overcome a drug dependency with the opportunity to seek the best possible prenatal care and substance abuse treatment to maximize both maternal and infant health. However, policies that threaten women with the loss of their children drive women away from health care and discourage them from seeking invaluable prenatal and pregnancy-related care.

This bill would not promote healthy pregnancies. Pregnant women who suffer from a drug dependency are less likely to seek essential prenatal care and social support systems when they are threatened with the loss of custody of their children. The threat fosters a climate of fear and mistrust between doctors and patients, imperiling the health both of women and their future children. To best promote healthy pregnancies, we should provide pregnant women easy access to comprehensive family-based treatment programs so they may get the help they need. Treatment programs that allow families to stay together enjoy successful outcomes for women and their children.

Every major medical group that has addressed the problems associated with drug use during pregnancy opposes punishments. The American Medical Association, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Nurses Association, and the March of Dimes are just some of the experts that oppose punishment of pregnant women and recognize that drug dependency is a medical condition that responds to appropriate treatment.

If we really want to help women have healthy pregnancies, Virginia should give pregnant women expanded access to comprehensive family-based treatment.