



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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NYS Senator Lea Webb and NYS Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, Lawmakers, Experts and Advocates Address the Maternal and Infant Mortality Crisis During Black Maternal Health Week

LEA WEBB April 15, 2024

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As Infant Mortality Rate Rises for the 1st Time in Decades, NY Electeds and Experts Combat Maternal Health Crisis & Racial Disparities

Albany, NY - This week, lawmakers, maternal healthcare experts and advocates convened at the New York State Capitol Building during **Black Maternal Health Week** to rally for legislation and action addressing the maternal mortality crisis; including the shocking spike

in infant mortality and deadly health disparities disproportionately damaging Black mothers.

NYS legislators spoke on advancing a Maternal Health Equity Agenda: sweeping legislation to combat skyrocketing maternal and infant mortality rates in New York, tackle racial and socioeconomic disparities, and create comprehensive reforms addressing the crisis' leading causes.

The Maternal Health Equity Agenda includes legislation to address this crisis through comprehensive actions combating the unacceptable racial disparities in maternal mortality.

Also focusing on the **7th Annual Black Maternal Health Week's** theme of **“Our Bodies STILL Belong to Us: Reproductive Justice NOW!”** elected officials emphasized the national importance of their legislation to expand reproductive rights while they are rapidly restricted in many states across the country.

Said Senator Lea Webb, Chair of the Senate Women's' Issues Committee, “This Black Maternal Health Week, I am proud to join Assemblymember Bichotte Hermelyn, colleagues, and advocates to introduce the Maternal Health Equity Agenda. Here in New York, we are facing a maternal and infant mortality crisis and the stakes could not be higher for Black mothers, their infants, and their families. This legislation will ensure equitable access to comprehensive healthcare, timely prenatal care, safe birthing experiences, comprehensive postpartum care, and reproductive health services, ensuring that New York is a safe and supportive environment for mothers and babies.”

"When you're pregnant it's the start of new beginnings, a celebratory time, but the healthcare system is failing Black families, leaving women and their infants to wonder if they will leave the hospital alive," **said Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn.** “We keep

hearing grim statistics: women in America are dying at a higher rate from pregnancy-related causes than women in any developed nation, while Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes. During Black Maternal Health Week, I'm proud to join my colleagues as we meet the moment for safer motherhood, and take action through legislation that holistically tackles the inequities and injustices so we can make motherhood safer for all New Yorkers."

Senator Cordell Cleare stated: "I commend Senator Lea Webb and Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, who are two of our greatest legislative champions. Furthermore, I am proud to support and co-sponsor many of the bills on your agenda today, including legislation to expand Medicaid coverage for pregnant and postpartum individuals and their children; requiring the advisory council on maternal mortality and morbidity to undertake a review of the cesarean births; and establishment of a maternal mental health workgroup."

Said Senator Samra Brouk, "This Black Maternal Health Week, I am grateful to stand shoulder to shoulder with my colleagues as we advocate for the inclusion of our Maternal Health Equity Agenda in this year's budget. We are facing a maternal and infant health crisis in New York, and like many other issues, Black women and their families are paying the price. Our state has an obligation to act to ensure that all birthing people receive the care and support they need to thrive, which includes prioritizing access to doula care, maternal mental health treatment, and so much more. Together, we can make the necessary investments to give new and growing families the resources they need to have for safe and healthy futures."

Senator Roxanne J. Persaud said, "Black Maternal Health Week brings awareness to the unfortunate reality that black mothers are disproportionately affected by inequities in the healthcare system. Though we have taken great strides at addressing these recently, more must be done quickly. Only then can this week be about simply celebrating motherhood and

the joy of childbirth."

The Maternal Health Equity Agenda includes the following legislation:

- Maternal Health Care and Birthing Standards Workgroup ([S7702A](#) Webb/[A8207A](#) Clark)
- Maternal Care Mobile App for Medicaid Recipients ([S7700A](#) Webb/A08230 Paulin)
- Reproductive Health Care Facilities and Religious Worship Access Act ([A04596](#) Bichotte Hermelyn)
- Coverage for Transvaginal Ultrasounds ([S05579](#) Scarcella- Spanton/A06042 Bichotte Hermelyn)
- Maternal Depression Screenings to New Moms ([S2039A](#) Brouk/A02870 Solages)
- Reproductive Freedom and Equity Grant Program ([S348C](#) Cleare/[A00361](#) Gonzales-Rojas)
- Special Enrollment Period Protections ([S201](#) Cleare/[A02656](#) Walker)
- Uterine Fibroid Awareness Campaign ([S3219A](#) Cleare/[A01087](#) Joyner)
- Ban on Carcinogenic Substances from Menstrual Products ([S3529A](#) Fernández/[A05990](#) Rosenthal)
- Hospital Transparency Act ([S1003A](#) Hinchey/[A00733](#) Rozic)
- Protection of Health Information ([S158B](#) Krueger/[A04983](#) Rosenthal)
- Permit Doulas in the Operating Room of Maternal Care Facilities ([S5991A](#) Persaud/[A07606](#) Solages)
- Guarantees Access to a Designated Doula ([S5992A](#) Persaud/[A06168](#) Solages)
- Maternal Mortality Data in Informational Materials ([S3610](#) Webb/[A05576](#) Sillitti)
- Stillbirth Protocol + Database ([A07204](#) Bichotte Hermelyn)

- Medicaid Coverage of Remote Ultrasounds and Remote fetal Non stress tests (S7960 Webb/A8168 Paulin)
- Awareness Campaign for Maternal Depression (S08176 Cleare/A09008 Bichotte Hermelyn)
- Doula Friendly Work Spaces (S07780 Brouk/A09035 Bichotte Hermelyn)
- Review of Projects affecting availability of maternity services (S7740 Webb/A8205A McDonald)
- Establishes a fetal infant mortality review board (S6045 Bailey/A9168 Jackson)
- Advisory Council on maternity mortality and morbidity to undertake a review of C-section births at hospitals (S5517A Brouk/A2367A Paulin)
- Chisholm Chance Act (S02898 Myrie/A04017 Jackson)
- Community Doula Expansion Grant Program (S7779 Brouk)

Background

This year marks the seventh anniversary of the Black Maternal Health Week Campaign. In, 2021 President Joe Biden signed a proclamation which established Black Maternal Health Week to highlight the racial disparities in maternal mortality rates in the United States.

Founded and led by the Black Mamas Matter Alliance, Black Maternal Health Week is an initiative aiming to deepen the conversation around Black maternal health in the US and advance solutions.

“Our Bodies STILL Belong to Us: Reproductive Justice NOW!” is this year's theme - spotlighting the widespread restrictions on abortion care access coupled with rising cases of criminalization due to pregnancy loss, which continue to widen the gaps of adverse maternal and birth outcomes in the U.S.

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