

2019 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 294

BY REPRESENTATIVES JIMMY HARRIS AND LEGER

A RESOLUTION

To urge and request the Louisiana Department of Health to take immediate action to address racial disparity in maternal and child health outcomes and the alarming rate of mortality for African American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

WHEREAS, the United States ranks thirty-two out of thirty-five of the world's wealthiest nations in infant mortality, and Louisiana has the fourth highest infant mortality rate in the country; and

WHEREAS, according to research by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, low birth weight is a significant factor in infant death and the number of low birth weight babies born in the United States is increasing at a rate greater than in other comparable countries, based largely on the unsettling data for African American infants; and

WHEREAS, African American infants are now more than twice as likely to die as white infants, with a death rate of eleven out of one thousand African American infants dying as compared to five out of every one thousand white infants, which results in more than four thousand unnecessarily lost African American infants each year; and

WHEREAS, based on a survey of United States government data, racial disparity in infant mortality rates is astonishingly wider now than in 1850, thirteen years before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation; and

WHEREAS, the United States is one of only thirteen countries in the world where the rate of maternal mortality, the death of a woman related to pregnancy or childbirth, is worse now than it was twenty-five years ago, with an estimated seven hundred to nine hundred maternal deaths annually; and

WHEREAS, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African American women are three to four times as likely to die from pregnancy-related causes as their white counterparts; and

WHEREAS, studies over the past twenty-five years show that education and income are not key determinants in this alarming trend as an African American woman with an advanced college degree is more likely to lose her baby than a white woman with less than an eighth-grade education; and

WHEREAS, recently there has been a growing acknowledgment among researchers and healthcare professionals that the debilitating effects of societal and systemic racism have created a toxic physiological stress for African American women, causing health problems such as hypertension and pre-eclampsia that directly lead to higher rates of infant and maternal death that are more reflective of the lived experience of race in this country as opposed to the genetics of race; and

WHEREAS, researchers have also indicated that there is a pervasive, longstanding racial bias in healthcare that results in the dismissal of legitimate concerns and symptoms of African American women during pregnancy which may result in misdiagnosis of conditions that can be fatal to the mother and infant; and

WHEREAS, national attention is now being given to the undeniable inequality and racial disparity in infant and maternal birth outcomes and Louisiana statistical data confirms that despite access to prenatal healthcare, African American infants in Louisiana are more than twice as likely to die as white infants, with more than twelve African American infant deaths per one thousand live births as compared to five white infant deaths per one thousand live births, the worst ranking in the United States; and

WHEREAS, these outcomes are utterly reprehensible and there is no time to waste studying this matter further as each day represents a chilling risk of losing yet another African American infant or mother in our state; and

WHEREAS, the current secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health, Dr. Rebekah Gee, is an obstetrician/gynecologist, and a trained policy expert who has served in numerous state and national policy roles, and prior to being appointed secretary, came to Louisiana to serve as the director for the Birth Outcomes Initiative where she led the charge to reduce unnecessary early caesarian section births; and

WHEREAS, Secretary Gee is the ideal expert to take a leadership role in this matter and implement, through the many programs in her department, immediate and tangible initiatives to protect the lives of African American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby request the Louisiana Department of Health to take immediate action to address racial disparity in maternal and child health outcomes and the alarming rate of mortality for African American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Secretary Gee's medical and policy expertise, the expertise of the many offices under her authority, including the bureaus and divisions within the office of public health and Medicaid, and the countless contacts she has both locally, nationally, and internationally make her department the ideal agency leader to champion this effort.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department take immediate actions within its jurisdiction and control, through an organized effort of healthcare, community, and religious professionals, or through regulatory action considered appropriate, to implement measures to combat this crisis, including requiring healthcare professional diversity sensitivity training, increasing access to home visits and doulas, and any other measure considered appropriate.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on or before August 1, 2019, the department submit a summary report to the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana identifying the immediate actions being taken to address mortality outcomes for African-American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on or before October 1, 2019, the department host a summit on this matter to gather representatives from a vast network of expertise in one setting to ensure that proper attention is given to this crisis and to chart a pathway forward to save the lives of African American women and infants in Louisiana that can be used as a national and worldwide model of excellence.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on or before December 31, 2019, the department submit a summit recommendation report to the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana identifying the long-term actions being proposed by summit participants to address mortality outcomes for African American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES